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THE ABBESS,

John Robertson

A ROMANCE.

Scott

BY THE AUTHOR

OF THE "DOMESTIC MANNERS OF THE AMERICANS," &c.

J'ai vu l'impie adoré sur la terre ;
Pareil au cedre il cachait dans les cieux
Son front audacieux ;
Il semblait à son gré gouverner le tonnerre,
Foulait aux pieds ses ennemis vaincus :
Je n'ai fait que passer—il n'était déjà plus.

RACINE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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WHITTAKER, TREACHER, AND CO.

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THE ABBESS.

CHAPTER XIX.

Quand nous avons le cœur sain, nous tirons parti de tout, et tout se tourne en plaisirs.

J. J. ROUSSEAU.

THE Abbess and her train had scarcely left the convent of St. Andrea, when Isidore shut himself into his study, and wrote the following letter.

“ From Isidore Bartone to Dominic di Pino.

“ Within an hour after your departure she arrived. You profess to feel yourself under obligations to me, di Pino, and have ever shown a strong desire to acquit yourself of them.—Be satisfied—you have over-paid them a thou-

sand-fold. Had the act which saved your neck from the power of the law, been achieved by the loss of both mine eyes, still should I say—you have over-paid it. At last, I have her then. I breathe more freely as I write the words.

“Can you not fancy, my di Pino, the feelings with which I watched the smooth and polished haughtiness of this woman? That air of quiet, firmly-rooted power, which used to act upon my burning hatred, like oil upon flame, now—that I knew, it tottered to its fall, was sweet to me, as a cooling draught to the thirsty traveller. At last I have her. But this girl, this Juliet is come with her. What does this mean? Some faltering change of purpose? But it matters not—I have her too.—It is another egg of the viper that stung me. So hatefully like too! But—it shall be crushed. All that I ask, of the God whom I have served in fastings, in vigils, and in scourgings, all that I ask is life—till that accursed race have felt my strength, beyond their power to scorn it!

“I am doubly sure of her, di Pino. With skill and perseverance that might suffice to win an

empire, I have succeeded in placing Camilla d'Organio in her hands——Did I tell you the history of that girl? You have so bewildered my sober intellects by the happiness, the unaccustomed happiness you have bestowed on me, my di Pino, that in truth I know not.

“The facts are these.

“A young and noble gentleman of Rome, by name Cesario di Mondello, was chosen by the Cardinal Rivalta as the husband of his niece. You know, I believe, how near and dear this niece is to her uncle. Otavia Rivalta loved Mondello, and the cardinal announced to the young man, his happiness; but, to his unspeakable rage, it was declined.

“Otavia, who with the figure of an angel is said to have the heart of a fury, watched him, found out that he haunted the house of one Filippo d'Organio, who had a lovely daughter, and set at work, I know not how many feminine intrigues, to make this girl a nun. It is quite needless to follow these, through all their windings; it is enough to know that the car-

dinal's power and his niece's vengeance achieved their object, that Camilla d'Organio was placed in the convent of St. Urbano, at Rome—and *professed*. Professed, observe; of that there is sufficient record. Mondello was furious,—declared that she was already his wife, defied the cardinal openly, and was banished from Rome. He found the means, however, of contriving a plan of escape for Camilla, which was all but successful; she was recognised and secured in a house where she had secreted herself, at the distance of a hundred yards from her convent, three days after she had quitted it. The superior refused to receive her again; and her father, who had secured the friendship of Cardinal Rivalta by using all his power to place the girl in a cloister, obtained her pardon through his influence, with a promise that the whole business should be concealed, and admission obtained for her in some respectable convent at a distance. Rivalta sent to me, stating the facts, and desiring me to seek some place for her reception. He added, in his light way,

that if the lady proved with child, the holy sisterhood might have the nursing it. Whether this were a mere idle jest, or that he had some intimation of the truth, I know not. It was enough for me, that the thing was possible; and I determined that the blot should fall upon the immaculate community of Sant' Catherina's: certain that if it did fall, our catholic Abbess would find it difficult to act the part that would be assigned her in such a drama. Now, should she flinch, di Pino.—The girl is arrived there—Simione has confessed her, but learnt nothing from her. Strange whispers are, however, already afloat among her companions, and it is probable that the true faith may soon receive the wholesome stimulative of a *Requiescat in pace*. These things always do good; they act upon the church as bitter drugs do on the body; they purge the foul humours generated by torpid indifference, and refresh the healthful current of the blood.

“ Our saintly Abbess will doubtless hear of this, from some of her well-disciplined flock, before

she sleeps this night. On Monday her precious niece is to receive from me the habit of a novice—and then—should she not, as in duty bound, and by the positive laws of conventual discipline commanded, should she not communicate the report to me—we may pretty well guess what will follow. I have her, di Pino, and I will hold her in my gripe, till she shall cease to be. Then—shall I not again have my foot upon the neck of my enemy? He still lives, that wretched heretic, whose accursed pen robbed me of the fair preferment which my zeal had won. It was within my grasp, and he tore it from me.

“Farewell, my friend! be ready with your evidence when I send for you: she shall be overwhelmed—buried a thousand fathom deep under the damning proofs of her accumulated guilt. Let none at the Santa Croce know that your short absence was other than a pilgrimage. It was a pilgrimage, di Pino, a holy pilgrimage. Should I ever reach the station it has been the object of my life to obtain——this business will

recall my name to them, di Pino. Whatever happens to me——think not that my soul's friend shall be forgotten.

“Thine in the faith of Christ,

“ISIDORE BARTONE.”

While her enemy was thus meditating her destruction, Geraldine d'Albano felt herself happier than she had been for many years, or than, only a few days before, she had ever hoped to be again. Every look, every word of Juliet, spoke the most devoted affection for her, and the hope of guarding her from sorrow, labouring for her happiness, and finally of ensuring it in the way she herself desired, filled her heart with gladness. She was now returning to duties which, though always punctually fulfilled, had often been tedious and irksome; but now she thought she should feel them so, no longer; and as she led her young niece into her home, all that had ever made it a painful one to her, seemed changed, or utterly forgotten.

The first thing that struck the young novice, was the appearance of universal pleasure at the return of the superior. It was expressed, however, by very little of outward demonstration. The Abbess passed onward to her parlour, and outside the door of this room a large party of the nuns was assembled, evidently for the satisfaction of getting a look at the Abbess as she passed. That this was really the motive, was shown by many phrases, which met her ear, as she followed.

“The saints bless her !”

“How well she looks.”

“Thank God ! we have her safe again,” and the like.

Geraldine passed through them, with a look of smiling kindness, which seemed intended for all ; for she distinguished none by any particular salutation. This kindness, too, was mixed with an air of dignity, which, though it did not amount to haughtiness, was, at least, equally distant from familiar intimacy. Every one, however, appeared satisfied, and never were

“golden opinions” more legible, than those which Juliet now read in the numerous eyes that were fixed upon her aunt.

As the Abbess entered the room, Juliet looked back at the crowd of nuns, to see if any of them were about to follow, but perceived that, having lost sight of their superior, all their attention was now turned to the four companions of her excursion. Each of these was immediately surrounded by a set of her particular intimates, and thus they moved off in four distinct bodies, to enjoy the mutual luxury of telling and hearing all the miniature events which had occurred since they parted. In this intercourse, however, the travellers were naturally the first speakers; they considered this as their right, and it made no trifling part of the advantage which accrued to them, from the envied distinction conferred by the expedition to Albano.

But when this first tribute to the importance of foreign wonders had been paid, the other party grew important in their turn; for they had news to tell of events within the cloister, at least

equal in interest to any that were recounted from without.

Of these we shall hear when they reach the Abbess, for we must now return to her. Having given this first glance of natural curiosity to those who were, for a time, to be her companions, Juliet followed her aunt into the parlour.

Here again she saw many indications that the return of the Abbess was welcome. Several little jars, filled with the choicest flowers, were placed in different parts of the room ;—the shades of the casements were carefully arranged, and at one of them was placed a chair and footstool, with a table beside them, on which were spread figs, grapes, and mulberries, in little baskets, formed by their own freshly-gathered leaves. The apartment was cool and fragrant, and the fond welcome she received from the noble recluse, as she entered, would have made a less agreeable retreat appear delightful to Juliet.

“ Kind souls !” exclaimed the Abbess, point-

ing to the pretty preparation for her arrival;—
“ Flowers and fruit are furnished by our gardens, Juliet; and they are luxuries which my nuns know I prize. I doubt not,” she continued, placing a chair for Juliet beside her own, and gently pushing the frail baskets towards her,—
“ I doubt not, but that every one of the community has assisted to set forth this little table, and to decorate my room; sister Agatha plaited these handles with tendrils of the vine; Philippa wove the bottoms with the young leaves of the olive; Rose and Teresa have twisted the sides together thus cleverly; and all the rest have, I will answer for it, been roaming through the gardens, since day-break, to pick the finest fruit, and to gather all this world of flowers.”

“ They love you,” said Juliet;—“ How easy is it to read that, in all their little labours:—and who was it arranged these flowers?—I never saw bouquets so graceful, and so much out of the common way.”

“ Ah! those were placed, I am sure, by my poor Camilla. I have already learnt to know

her light, wavy, delicate bouquets from all others.

“ Your poor Camilla? and who is that?”

“ She is the nun who has lately joined us; you heard me inquire for her, of the Abbot; she appears ill, and unhappy; nevertheless, there is something peculiarly pleasing about her; you must cultivate her acquaintance, Juliet; I may not distinguish any one, by paying them particular attention; but you are not so restrained, and I hope you may win her friendship, and be a comfort to her; but remember this can only be through your own attention and kindness to her;—were I to present her particularly to my niece, as her future friend, I should draw down upon her more jealousy, than any affection from either of us could easily atone for.”

“ I hope I may find her willing to receive me as a friend,” replied Juliet; “ I, on my part, am willing to give her all the love I can spare from you.—But why *may* you not distinguish her yourself, if you think she deserves it?”

Geraldine smiled at the question.

“You have never been an abbess—nor a queen, Juliet, or you would not ask this.”

“Oh, what a life for you!” exclaimed Juliet; “you have then lived without a companion, and without a friend?”

“Most surely I have, in your sense of the word,” replied the Abbess, “and this has, indeed, been my only real sorrow. The world, as it is called, I never knew—and could, therefore, easily determine to forget its name—but the conversations, the readings, the reasonings, with my mother——. Every year that has passed since I lost them, has only taught me to prize them more. But do not look at me so pitifully, dearest;—I have found her again in you. You are an extraordinary girl, Juliet, considering the scanty advantages you have had—but my mother’s spirit is in your eyes—and it will be strange, if in the ample leisure of this still retreat, you do not learn to feel and think as she did.”

At this moment the door opened, and a veiled

head appeared at it; but it was immediately withdrawn, and the door closed.

“Surely, that was sister Agatha—run, Juliet, and recall her. She must have something more than common to communicate, or she would not come thus, without a summons.”

Juliet obeyed, and presently returned with the nun, who was a pleasing-looking woman, about forty.

“You are engaged, dear mother?” she said, pausing at the door.

“Not so, but that I can receive you, my daughter,” replied the Abbess. “Do you wish to speak to me, sister Agatha?”

“When you are alone, holy mother.”

“Call hither the mother of the novices then, sister Agatha, and she shall lead my niece to her cell. Return with her—and I will then speak with you.”

The nun left the room to obey.

“I fear I shall be a good deal occupied, for some days, Juliet, in hearing from the elder

nuns, all that has passed in my absence. This must be submitted to—though it is not probable that they have any thing more important to relate, than how many flowers sister Anne has embroidered on the altar-cloth—or how many lessons sister Marguerette has taken in singing. But if I did not listen to all this, with as much attention as the Doge hears a report from the Senate, I should soon lose my authority and my reputation.”

“Would to God you had an occupation more worthy of you,” said Juliet, embracing her.

“I shall have such now,” returned Geraldine, cheerfully. “Have I not that dear head to clear of a world of time-stained rubbish, which has been carefully laid up in it, in lieu of pure gold?—but here they come.”

The countenance of the Abbess resumed its wonted look of cold, but gentle gravity, as they entered.

An elderly nun, with a lively eye, and much bustling activity in her manner, now accompanied sister Agatha to the parlour.

“ Good day, sister Marcella,” said the superior, “ I have brought you a new novice, in my niece. Let her have the vacant cell, at the corner where the nuns’ east gallery crosses that of the novices’—the cell next sister Camilla’s, I mean—I know you will be careful of her comfort.”

“ The cell at the corner of the novices’ gallery, holy mother?—next sister Camilla’s?”

The two nuns exchanged glances.

“ Yes,” answered the Abbess. “ It is not occupied, is it?”

“ No, holy mother.”

“ Then lead my niece to it. It looks into the garden, Juliet,—and you will see flowers, as beautiful as those you have left.”

Juliet only answered by a respectful obeisance, and followed Marcella out of the room.

The young novice was, as we have said, familiar with the interior of a convent, and, therefore, felt no dismay at the gloomy arched passages, and sky-lit corridors by which she passed to the novices’ gallery. When almost arrived

at the door of the little room that was destined for her, she observed a nun advancing towards them, who drew her veil close over her face as they passed.

Marcella looked after her for a moment, and then drawing close to Juliet said, almost in a whisper—

“That is sister Camilla.”

Juliet immediately turned, with much interest, to look at her—but she had passed quickly, and her tall stature was all that she could distinguish.

On entering her room, Juliet found it much more cheerful than she had expected; the casement being large, and opening upon a garden, which, though surrounded on all sides by the high prison-like walls of the convent enclosure, was still beautiful from its profusion of flowers. The whole garden appeared to be laid out in beds, intersected by broad walks; excepting where, towards the north, a lofty grove of mulberry-trees seemed to offer shade and solitude to any recluse who might wish to find them.

The good-humoured and officious mother of the

novices entered the cell with her new pupil, and pointed out to her, with much complacency, the pretty oratory, the soft pillow, the pleasant window, and the general neat appearance of the little chamber.

“Are you pleased, my dear!” said the good Marcella. “Is it prettier than you expected?”

Juliet assured her that it was.

“And when are we to take the habit? it will be the Abbot himself, I will engage, who will give it to us; ’tis not very often he does it,—but the holy mother’s own niece—oh! he can do no less. I hope nothing will happen to disappoint us; that would be a pity, my dear, wouldn’t it?”

Juliet, who was still engaged in admiring the garden, turned to give some sort of answer to this, but before she could speak, Marcella continued—

“I say, my dear, I wonder who will give us the exhortation? Fra’ Basile perhaps—or it may be Fra’ Simione—mayn’t it? Oh, we shall look well in the veil—the dress will make us ten times prettier than ever.”

These questions, exclamations, and observations, followed each other so closely, that Juliet abandoned the idea of replying to any of them. She stood with her eyes fixed on the garden, and meditating, with a degree of emotion, not quite suitable to the place she was in, on one who she thought would not well like to know that she had gone, where it would be so impossible for him to follow. As she continued to look into the garden, she recognised the same tall figure which had passed them in the gallery.

“That is sister Camilla, is it not?” said she.

“Yes, yes,” answered Marcella; “there she goes, always under those dark mulberry trees. Our mother must look after her, or mischief will come of it.”

“Is there any harm in her walking there, mother Marcella?”

“It is not for me to say, my dear; she is not a novice you know.”

“Are not the novices allowed the range of the garden?” inquired Juliet, rather alarmed.

“ The saints bless you, my dear !—yes, to be sure they are—the garden, and the flowers, and the fruit too, once a day.”

“ Only once a day, mother ?—may we walk out only once a day ?”

“ For walking, yes ; but not in the fruit garden—bless you, Carina, we should not have a fig or a grape left at the end of a month, if you were all suffered to range at will, through the fruit trees——no, no, my dear, that would never do.”

“ But if that is all, mother Marcella, why do you think it so wrong for sister Camilla to walk under those trees ? are you afraid she should run away with all the mulberries ?”

Marcella laughed heartily.

“ No, no, my dear, for a certainty, that was not what I was thinking of ; but zitt', zitto, Signorina—I must not tell you quite every thing either. Shall I go and see to have your mails and boxes brought up here, my dear ? you have not brought many things, I suppose ?—that would only be to fill up the little room

there is, to no purpose; for we will have the novice's habit ready in no time—if that's all we wait for."

Juliet longed to get rid of her, and replied, that she should be very glad to have her luggage conveyed to her room, adding—

"Is there any objection, good mother, to my seeing my page for a few minutes?"

The old woman crossed herself, and muttered sundry ejaculations.

"Your page, child! What a boy? a boy page, my dear!—and you born and bred in a Christian country—say nothing of a catholic. Why what do you think would become of us all, with a boy let to run loose about the novices' gallery? Jesu Maria!—you are certainly distracted, my dear."

Juliet apologized for her thoughtlessness, and said she would walk down into the garden, till the Abbess should be at leisure, when she would ask to see the little boy in the parlour.

"That's all very well," replied the gossiping

Marcella.—“ Poor little fellow ! ’tis but a baby, to be sure—we will take good care of him among us, never fear—he shall live upon sugar plums.—He will have to sleep at the porter’s lodgings, as right and fitting he should—but we elder nuns have our privileges—and he must not be kept at the porter’s lodgings all day. Sister Clara says he was breaking his little heart, when you talked of leaving him behind ; and sister Beatrice tells a most beautiful story, of his being found all stark naked, at the foot of the altar, with two angels standing over him, to keep the cold wind away, with their wings—that’s just true— isn’t it, my dear ? Sure he must be meant for something out of the common way—don’t you think so ?—Why perhaps, he may live to be Pope, my dear ?—Or perhaps, he will be a martyr and a saint ? We all say, he looks as if he were born for some great fortune.”

All this was uttered, as they pursued their way to the garden. Having reached the door that led to it, Marcella took her leave, saying, that

she had at least seven thousand things to do before vespers, and it only wanted half an hour of the time.

Juliet almost ran out through the garden door, so weary was she of the gabble of her new acquaintance. On entering the large well-kept garden, she gave one glance of approbation at the beautiful flower beds, and then turned immediately towards the grove of mulberry trees, determined to lose no time in obeying the wish her aunt had expressed, that she should volunteer attention and kindness to the melancholy Camilla.

Her white dress and black veil were still visible among the trees, and Juliet contrived to overtake her, just as she reached the termination of the avenue. An introduction is not so necessary in the garden of a convent, as in the Tuileries. A gentle "Ave!" and an humble inclination of the head, is all that ceremony requires, and these being exchanged, they turned together.

"You do not know me, sister Camilla, though

I already feel as if I knew you. I am Juliet d'Albano, and my aunt has told me that she hopes I shall be happy enough to obtain your friendship."

At these words Camilla raised her head, and Juliet, for the first time, obtained a view of her face, which had been completely concealed by her over-hanging hood. Camilla had been, and at no very distant period, surpassingly handsome, but now there was not the slightest trace of beauty remaining on her face. Her complexion was faded and colourless; her eyes deep-sunk, heavy, and dull; her excessive thinness made her features appear almost frightfully large, and her tall figure was shapeless, uncouth, and awkward.

"Your aunt? are you the niece of the Abbess?" said she, in return to Juliet's address.

"Yes, dear sister, and I hope that relationship may be the means of recommending me to your favour."

"My favour!——The Abbess knows nothing about me, my poor child, or she would

not have recommended you to seek my favour."

"And why not, sister Camilla? She thinks you are ill—she fears that you are unhappy—and though her cares for all leave her but little time to devote to individuals, she is most anxious for you. Let me, then, be her deputy; and receive my offered friendship, as a proof that you possess hers."

There was something in the look and voice of Juliet not easy to resist, and Camilla silently placed her arm within that of her young companion. They walked on together for some minutes without speaking; at length Camilla said—

"Geraldine d'Albano is a noble-minded woman. The few hours we have passed together have been enough to show me this; but we meet not on equal terms—I see her as she is—she does not see me so. I am not what I seem."

Juliet knew not what to think of this avowal;

she was surprised, too, at hearing her aunt named in her own convent otherwise than as "the Abbess;" but, after a little reflection, it occurred to her, that it was possible Camilla herself was not a catholic, and therefore would not recognise a title, conferred by a power she did not acknowledge.

"Perhaps, I understand you," said Juliet, timidly. "Perhaps you consider such vows as you have made, not binding?"

"Pardon me, young lady. I have better studied a Christian's duty, than to quibble with any vow uttered in the name of God. All vows are binding. Your aunt is a vowed nun, and an anointed Abbess. When I called her by her own proper name, it was not to rob her of a title, but to give her a higher. Your aunt is Abbess of Sant' Catherina's; it is a station of great power and influence; but if I mistake not, Geraldine d'Albano is something greater still."

It was impossible that Camilla could have said

any thing which would so completely have won the heart of Juliet as these words. This was exactly what she felt herself.

“Now, at least, I understand you, dear Camilla,” said she; “you need say no more to make me love you.”

“You are very kind, Signora,” replied poor Camilla, with a melancholy smile; “I ought to feel comfort from such an assurance; but I am too unhappy to wish that any one should love me.”

To such a heart as Juliet’s, this answer, instead of being repulsive, only served to make her more anxiously desire the friendship and confidence of the nun; and gently pressing the arm which still rested upon hers, she replied—

“I will not ask you to promise me your love and confidence, sister Camilla; but you cannot prevent my wishing for, or my trying to win, both.”

“My confidence!——poor child!——you know not what you ask for.”

“Then give it to my aunt instead—she at least may comfort you.”

“No!——To do that, is not within the limit of human power. Yet you say well, sweet girl; and if she will listen to me——I am willing to tell her all.”

“Dear Camilla!” replied Juliet, “why do you tremble thus? Oh! if you knew her ——.”

The bell sounded for vespers.

“Let me enter the chapel before the nuns crowd into it,” said Camilla hastening her steps. “They all stare at me—— because I look so wretched.”

“Not so—oh! do not think it. You are still almost a stranger—but now, they will have me to stare at. I assure you, I dread it too. Shall we enter the chapel together? or think you I must wait for the mother Marcella?”

“Go with me to the door, dear girl—and then leave me. Yes,—Marcella will expect you.”

With quick and almost trembling steps, the unhappy Camilla led her companion to the chapel door, and holding her hand for a moment before she entered, uttered the words—"God bless you, dear girl!" in a tone which went to the heart of Juliet, so full was it, both of melancholy and of kindness.

CHAPTER XX.

Le babil seul, les dédommagera de toute la gêne.

ROUSSEAU.

As Juliet retreated from the door in order to seek Marcella, she met sister Clara, who, having seen her pass towards it, came good-naturedly to tell her, that the mother of the novices was surprised, because she was not to be found either in her cell or in the garden.

“Where is she, sister Clara?” said Juliet, laughing; “I hope she is not very angry, for I should by no means like to set her scolding.”

“You are right there, my dear child,” replied the nun; “sister Marcella is a kind mother to

the novices ; but when she begins to scold, she says three words while any one else could say one.—Mercy on us ! there she is—make haste, Signora Juliet—run on before me—she is in the passage—do not let her see you with me, or she will say that I have detained you.”

Sister Clara, as she said this, escaped round a corner, and when Marcella arrived, she found her new charge looking about with a very bewildered air, Juliet being, in truth, quite at a loss to know which way she was to go. This at once disarmed the anger of good Marcella.

“ God bless you, my dear,” she exclaimed, “ where in the world have you got to ? Poor dear little soul, how frightened it looks—what ! you were just looking for me to take you to the chapel, my dear ?—that was it, wasn’t it ?—Come along then—no, no, not back again—this is the way to our door—and they’ll be all waiting to have a look at us as we pass—never you doubt that.”

As soon as Juliet reached her place, her first object was to see if her aunt were visible from

it; but she had not yet entered the chapel. A moment after, however, she passed up the aisle, and almost close to Juliet, but did not appear to see her. As soon as she arrived at her station, the service began; and though in kneeling, her face was partially concealed, Juliet was struck by its unusual paleness.

Immediately after the vesper service, the whole community assembled in the refectory for supper. Juliet had now to undergo the curious examination of above a hundred eyes, which were keenly set for observation—not only because they had never seen her before, but because the fast they were obliged to keep from novelties of all kinds, created an appetite for them, which none but recluses can know. Finding herself a little embarrassed, she gladly took the arm of her new friend, Camilla, who happened to be standing near her, and turned her eyes anxiously towards the door to watch for the entrance of her aunt.

Whispered conferences were going on, all round her, though she could distinguish nothing of what was said. At length, “Here’s

the Abbess," was distinctly heard from many voices, and she entered as they spoke. Juliet was now more aware than—even when she saw her in the chapel,—that her aunt was looking extremely ill, and felt so much alarmed that she endeavoured to approach her, still holding the arm of Camilla, to inquire for her health; but before she reached her, the mother of the novices came up, and taking her hand, said—

“This way—this way, my dear. Please, sister Camilla, to take your place with the nuns: come, my dear, I will sit next you myself—make haste—see, our mother has taken her place already.”

The grace was sung, and the supper passed with quiet decorum; but amid the clatter of trenchers, the soft mutterings of female tongues were occasionally audible.

The hour of recreation followed; and Juliet waited a moment before she left the hall, in the hope that Camilla would again join her. Her aunt observed her, and having caught her eye, waved her hand in the direction of a door, that

led towards the garden, by which many of the community were passing. Juliet understood that she wished her to join them, and prepared to do so; but before she left the room, she saw the Abbess and Camilla quit it together by the opposite door.

The nuns now came crowding round her from every direction, and she was glad to distinguish sister Beatrice among them, whom she considered as an old acquaintance, and who seemed well pleased to take her under her especial protection.

“Let us all go into the garden, Signora,” said she, taking her arm, “and then you may become acquainted with your companions. Come here, sister Rosa. This is a young novice, Signora; she has been here only a few weeks. Perhaps you two may take the veil together; that would be very pleasant, indeed—and it would make the ceremony so grand. We shall have all Ancona, there’s no doubt of that.”

Sister Rosa looked gloomy, and answered nothing.

“ That is sister Dorethea, who is close to you on that side ; and here’s your old acquaintance, sister Clara :—come along.”

All this was said, as about thirty of them were all crowding together through the passage that led to the garden. Even when they had made their way through it, and were fairly in the garden, Juliet still found it very difficult to walk, from the number of nuns and novices who crowded upon her, in all directions. The party who immediately surrounded her, was composed of the younger part of the community, and many pretty faces were visible among the veiled heads.

Some walked backwards, that they might see and hear her with more convenience ; some hung over her shoulders ; and she was flanked on both sides by at least half a dozen, who had contrived to knot themselves together in a mass, which seemed to stick close to her, as if by one common impulse. There was hardly one of the whole set who did not instantly assail her with questions.

“ How old is the Signora ?”

“ What is the Signora’s name ?”

“ What name will the Signora take with her vows ?”

“ Perhaps the Signora will keep her own ?”

“ The Signora knows our Abbess never changed hers ?”

“ The Signora is our Abbess’s own niece.”

And then it was—

“ Has she any sisters ?”

“ Has she any brothers ?”

“ Are they grown up ?”

“ Will they come to the parlour ?”

And many many more. To all this, Juliet answered smilingly, and, as nearly as it was possible, in the same order in which they were asked.

In the midst of this scene, which, whatever the worldly reader may think of it, is by far the greatest enjoyment that can fall to the lot of a party of nuns, one of the novices, who was walking backwards, in front of Juliet, exclaimed—

“ If there is not that abominable mother Marcella, coming to spoil all our pleasure !”

“ Don’t answer her, Signora,” said another,—
“ she can’t scold you yet, for she is no mother of yours, till you have taken the habit.”

The bustling old woman hastened towards them, calling out, as soon as she was within hearing,—“ Well, dears, here you are, like bees round honey. We have not had such a pretty new-comer for a long time—have we? Not that you are much amiss, sister Rosa, when you don’t look cross.—Mind your veils, ladies; pray hold them seemly. ’Tis well the walls are high, sister Celesta. When I was a novice, I would not have let my head be uncovered like that for something; you should not let the birds in the trees see you so.”

As she spoke, she fidgitted from one to another, settling a plait here, and arranging a fold there, greatly to the annoyance, as it appeared, of the young ladies on whom her cares were bestowed.

All the nuns of the party had turned off into

another walk, as soon as Marcella approached them ; and a laugh, in which, perhaps, there was less of gaiety than of ridicule, reached the spot they had left.

“ Fie, fie,” said the old woman, “ that’s the way your young heads are turned. Things are not half as they ought to be in these days. When I was a novice, no nun dared to look at our mother ;—the mother of the novices I mean, not the Abbess, you know, but the mother of the novices, like me,—no one would have ventured to come near her, without a civil ‘ Ave,’ instead of tittering away in that manner. But they tell me, every thing is changed for the worse, outside the convents as well as inside. Sister Clementina, have you said your twelve credo’s, for that horrid long stitch you put in the hyacinth ?”

Juliet began to fear, that the delight she had promised herself from residing with her instructor and friend, would not be easily enjoyed in so large a community. She was disappointed at not having been sent for, by her aunt ; she was disappointed at not being able to renew her

conversation with the melancholy, but interesting Camilla; and now that she saw no present mode of escape from the intolerable tongue of Marcella, she felt thoroughly low-spirited and unhappy. Could she see Morgante, it would be a comfort she thought; and in despair of any other, she ventured to ask the mother if the boy might be permitted to come to her in the garden?

“Why—perhaps—I don’t know—you must let me think about it, my dear. Poor little fellow! He does, to be sure, look for all the world like a rabbit in a drawing-room. It will be but Christian charity, I believe, to let him have a look at you. Well—wait here a bit then, and I’ll go and see about it.”

Juliet thanked her for her kindness, and she set off, muttering as she went,—“No great harm can come of it—he is but a baby, though they call him a page—in my time——” and so she went on, till quite out of hearing.

“A page?—did she say a page?” demanded

one of the young girls, who was standing near Juliet.

“You have not brought a page with you, Signora Juliet?—have you?” said another.

“My aunt,” replied Juliet, “begged my father to let her have the boy who acted-as my page, to assist her secretary in writing for her; for one so young, he writes excellently well.”

“And your page is coming here?” again questioned the young novice;—“Well! he must have bewitched mother Marcella, that is certain, or she never would dream of bringing him here.”

“How old is he?”

“Is he well born?”

“What is his name?”

“Is he handsome?”

“Is he tall?”

These questions, and many more of equal importance, were eagerly asked, while every girl in the group found some little arrangement

necessary for her veil, or her hood, or her rosary, and every eye was turned to the gate at which they expected to see him enter.

In a few minutes, Marcella again appeared, and till she had advanced some steps, they thought she had returned alone. At length, peeping from behind her, was seen the miniature page, and "Oh-h-h!" in every imaginable accent of disappointment, chagrin, and surprise, was uttered simultaneously by the whole party. Juliet observed the universal air of vexation, and could hardly resist her inclination to laugh; her attention, however, was immediately drawn to her little favourite, and she was delighted to see that he looked as gay and saucy as ever; though she rather wondered that so active a spirit could have endured the restraint he must have been subjected to, and yet keep so merry an eye as that with which he now regarded her. She knew not all the causes of mirth he had found in the kitchen of the convent, nor the variety of dainties and presents which the elder, and more privileged members of the community

had already bestowed on him. Notwithstanding all this, he was in extacies at the sight of his young mistress, and exclaimed, with very little consideration of the place where he was, or of the ears that were listening to him,—

“The Virgin and all her holy company be praised, Signora! I thought, for certain, they had locked you up in your cell; and I meant to climb that high wall there, and clamber up to all the windows, one after another, till I found you out.—What a beautiful garden you have got here! —and all these ladies are the nuns, I suppose—but they are prettier than the nuns they sent us to Albano.—I suppose, ma’am, (addressing Marcella) that you would not trust these young ones out, for fear they should never come back. Well—I am sure, they all look as merry as Olive herself. May I come and walk in this garden with you, Signora, whenever I like?”

“You don’t know what you are talking about, my darling,” said old Marcella;—“we should soon have a visit from my lord Abbot, just to

ask what was the matter with us, if that were granted, I take it.—No, no, my man, you must run about, outside the walls, when you want exercise. We don't want to make a nun of you, you know—but for the garden—no.”

Morgante looked at the novices, and they all laughed.

“Away with you, my man,” said Marcella, giving him a gentle push,—“away with you, I say; your eyes are older than your stature. I must have no looking and laughing among my young ladies here. Come along, master page, come along.”

“May I not speak one word to my lady mistress?” said Morgante.

“Well then, make haste—speak away, and have done.”

“Are you happy, Signora?” said the boy in a low whisper; but Juliet discreetly answered him aloud.

“Yes, Morgante, very happy. And pray how do you like the convent? I hope you are very well behaved and orderly?”

“ Why, as for my liking the convent, Signora, I shall find no fault with it, provided we do not stay too long—and, as for my behaviour, I suppose it is as it should be, because more old ladies than I ever saw in my life before, have done nothing but pat my head, and call me dear and darling, ever since I arrived.”

The novices again laughed aloud at this sally.

“ Come along, you little imp you,” said the mother, seizing him by the shoulder, “ they shall none of them call you so again, I promise ye.”

The boy could not resist his inclination to laugh, though it appeared as if Marcella shook him not very gently, as she led him away.

“ Cross old plague !” cried one of the young ladies, who felt disposed to forgive the diminutive size of the page, in favour of his sauciness.

“ Cross old plague ! I perfectly hate her.”

“ We have got rid of her for the present at any rate,” observed another ; and again Juliet had to hear, and answer as she could, innume-

rable questions, respecting herself, her family, and her home.

The remainder of the evening wore heavily away. No message from her aunt—no intimation that she was remembered—no farther intercourse with Camilla. When notice was given that the novices were to retire to their cells for the night, Juliet addressed herself to Marcella, and anxiously asked if she might not visit her aunt.

“My dear!—as if you could go without being sent for,” replied the old woman: “she is not my aunt, to be sure; but I think I know her better than you do, for all that. She is a good, and most holy lady—our convent’s a pattern,——but it won’t do to make too free with her. Every body must know their place here—you understand, my dear?”

Juliet understood nothing, but that she was disappointed and unhappy; and when at length she retired to her cell, she lay down upon her little bed, and fairly cried herself to sleep.

About an hour before midnight, she was awakened by the light of a lamp falling full upon her eyes; she looked up, and saw her aunt standing beside her.

“My poor Juliet!” she said affectionately, “This has been a sad day for you—and for me too, my love. But it was impossible for me to see you before.”

“Thank God!” exclaimed Juliet, “that you are come to see me now. Oh! I have been too unhappy! Tell me—are you ill? Has any thing happened to you? Is not something the matter?”

“Alas! yes, dearest—much, much is the matter. I have suffered more in mind since I returned home, Juliet, than during the whole period of my dwelling here.”

“Gracious heaven! and are you suffering still? Tell me,” exclaimed Juliet, suddenly starting up; “does any danger threaten you?”

“None, dear girl,” replied the Abbess, in a voice of cheering confidence; “none that I shall not have the power to baffle, as I have done

before a hundred times. But the anxiety I speak of, was for another; for that poor Camilla; her situation is most dreadful—but I shall save her—my whole plan is now arranged, and I am tranquil; be you so, too, dearest. Good night, my Juliet; I could not sleep till I had said one word to you; but you must wait for all explanation till to-morrow. Good night.”

“But stay one moment,” cried Juliet; “when may I come to your parlour? Must I always wait till you send for me? Tell me where it is that we can talk together? May you come and sit with me here?”

Geraldine answered with a smile, “You have asked so many questions, Juliet, and some of them so difficult to answer, that I think they must all be postponed till to-morrow morning. You shall breakfast with me.”

“Alone?”

“Yes, alone; and then you may ask me as many questions as you please; and, moreover, I promise to answer them all. Good night!”

With what different feelings did Juliet now “address herself to sleep again.” There is magic, thought she, in that voice; one word from her can change the whole aspect of things in a moment.

CHAPTER XXI.

All the fair effects of future hopes.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE next morning, sister Agatha came to the cell of Juliet, and told her that the Lady Abbess waited breakfast for her. She was quite ready, and, with spirits recruited by a night of sound sleep, and a morning of bright sun-shine, walked gaily through the long corridors with her gentle companion.

“Have you rested well, Signora?” said the nun.

“Never better, dear sister; your convent is delightful. What a garden! what flowers!”

“ Our convent is the richest in the Duchy ; and our ladies are most of them noble.”

“ Indeed !—and so numerous too.”

“ Our convent has more cells than any other in Italy.”

“ And are they all so comfortable as mine ?”

“ All exactly alike ; excepting that some of the sisters have images and relics of their own.”

“ And the air is so fine here ;—I think the convent must be very healthy ?”

“ I believe so.—Our chapel has the heaviest golden candlesticks of any chapel in the state of the church, out of Rome.”

“ Really !—and all the rooms and passages are so lofty, and so well aired.”

“ Yes.—We have three images of the Virgin in solid silver, beside our Sant’ Catherina ;—and that is silver gilt.”

“ You don’t say so ?—In the convent where I was educated, our refectory was not half so large and well lighted as yours.”

“ I dare say it was not.—Our convent has the largest piece of the real cross in the state ; and

it is the only relic in Italy that has got diamonds round the lock and handle of the coffer in which it is kept."

"Altogether your convent seems to be very superior."

"It is the first in Italy."

"You must feel very happy in belonging to it."

"Yes, very.—Only the years seem so long!"

On reaching the apartment of the Abbess, Juliet was again surprised by the air of comfort and cheerfulness which it exhibited. She had not believed that any room in a nunnery could be so pleasant. It was situated on the floor below her cell, and commanded the same view of the garden, having too large casements, which opened upon balconies filled with flowers. From the size and shape of the room, it was evident that it had been intended either for a public parlour, or a room for business. The Abbess certainly used it as the latter, as was evident from the number of papers lying upon a table at which she was writing, and the many more

which were carefully arranged on a stand near it. A breakfast of fruit, milk, and bread, was spread upon a table close to an open window.

Sister Agatha took her leave at the door, and Juliet entered alone. The Abbess rose to meet her, and the embrace which followed, made Juliet feel that she was once more in possession of her aunt. She looked round the light and cheerful room with equal satisfaction and surprise—

“Is it possible,” she exclaimed, “that this is what I have almost died in anticipating? is this being in a convent?—is this being in the hands of the fearful Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s?”

Geraldine, who looked and felt almost as happy as her niece, answered gaily—

“And is this having a little novice forced upon one—who has just lost her lover in the wood?”

Juliet blushed, and shook her head reproachfully—

“Is not that cruel, aunt? I am constantly trying to drive your strange mystery from my

mind, and at the very moment when I have almost succeeded, you bring it back again. Poor fellow! I wish he knew how very happy I am——my dear aunt, how do you make oranges and myrtles^s grow so beautifully small as these are?”

The Abbess looked at her, and laughed.

“Do you know, Juliet,” said she, “that I begin to doubt if you are really very much in love, after all.”

“Oh yes I am,” she replied gravely, “I love him very dearly—and—I think I should break my heart if he did not love me. But every thing was so different before I knew you. I cannot express to you how completely I felt alone in the world. If I had had a sister—or if my brother had been older than I am—I should have been a very different girl.

“Do you repent then, Juliet?”

“Repent, aunt?—repent having listened to him? I do not mean that—but—if you knew how often I have wandered about that garden and that wood, and longed to have a friend to

talk to! No, I do not repent. But if I had known you first, I should not have been so easily wooed—be sure of that.”

The Abbess listened to her with great attention, and as if anxious to ascertain what was passing in her heart.

“Tell me,” she said, “dear Juliet, and let it be with all your own frank sincerity,—do you think that your feelings towards Hubert are changed since you have known me?”

“Towards Hubert, as you please to call him, I am sure they are not—but certainly all my feelings about myself, are completely altered.”

“But this may be enough, my love, to make you wish your engagement with him did not exist. Do not trifle with him, Juliet. He—his—I mean to say that his manner has interested me sufficiently, to make me anxious that you should fully understand the nature of your own feelings towards him, before I make any effort to remove the difficulties which lie in the way of your union. There are certainly many obstacles that divide you from him, Juliet; yet

I would—you cannot guess how much I would do to overcome them; but this could only be if I were convinced that your whole heart were his. If you are not quite sure of this——confess it, Juliet, and I will give it up at once.”

During the whole of this speech, Juliet was engaged in stripping the leaves off a branch of myrtle—but on hearing the last words, it fell upon her lap; she clasped her hands fervently together, and said with passionate earnestness—

“ You tell me to speak frankly, aunt, and I will do so. Rather than give him up, I would forsake name, country, and kindred—and that without a thought of wavering—unless I looked back to take a last glance at you. Perhaps,” she added, while tears started to her eyes, “ perhaps you think me childish and inconstant, but he shall not find me so.”

“ Enough, enough, dear love ! I am satisfied, and you may be so too, Juliet. Fancy that you have some good fairy for a god-mother, who will bring about all you desire, without giving you any trouble about the matter—and

remember, above all things, that if you ask any questions, her power will be destroyed—now then, pick up your branch of myrtle, and listen to the clear notes of that beautiful blackbird—moreover, let us eat our breakfast.”

It was certainly with something very like the blind reliance upon supernatural power which the Abbess recommended, that Juliet now rested her hopes, almost without a shadow of anxiety as to the future. So perfect was this hope and confidence, that she would not have formed a wish for the present, beyond what she enjoyed, had it not been for the air of thought and anxiety which she again saw settling on the countenance of her aunt. This painful expression was immediately reflected on her own, and she looked an anxious inquiry, though she spoke none.

“ I see that you are uneasy about me, Juliet ; I saw it yesterday in the glances you cast on me at chapel, and in the refectory—you are right :—all is not as it should be.”

“ Your anxiety is for poor Camilla ? Is it not so ? ”

“It is indeed. But how do you know this? Surely she has not communicated her situation to you?”

“She has told me nothing, except in general terms that she was ^{is} most unhappy—she said too, ~~that~~ if you would hear her, she would communicate the cause to you.”

“She has done so, Juliet—and though I would willingly spare you the pain of sharing my anxiety, I cannot do this—I must consult you on one very important point, on which only you can answer me—and while doing this, I will not keep you ignorant of my reasons for it. It will, indeed, be a most dear comfort to me to have your sympathy—and, perhaps, your assistance in the business I am upon.”

“Heaven grant I may be able to help you, my dearest aunt!” replied Juliet; “I need not tell you how willing I am to do so.”

“Indeed you need not. But first let me be satisfied on one most important point. Think you, Juliet, that I may venture to trust Morgante in a business precious as life?”

“ If by trust, you mean assurance of his honour and his, truth I am, indeed, sure that you may—but if you ask, what confidence you may place in his strength or knowledge—I know not what to say. He has never been exposed to danger or fatigue—and is as ignorant of every thing beyond the circuit of ten miles round Albano, as the babe born yesterday.”

“ That matters not—he shall be carefully guarded ; but I want his wit and his fidelity.”

“ Then you may trust him—and I will pledge my honour for the truth of his.”

“ That is well, Juliet. This assurance is most important—as you will see. Now listen to me. This unhappy woman is a wife—married, as she assures me, and as I truly believe, two months before the time at which it is stated she was professed. This ceremony, she assures me, never was completed. Spite of all the opposition she could offer, she was led up to the altar, but positively refused to take the vows, though this refusal was drowned in the clamour around her. Unfortunately she did not declare

her marriage, from the fear of compromising the Count di Mondello her husband, who was already marked for persecution by the same powerful enemy who was seeking to destroy her. She felt that the ceremony was only an idle profanation, in the sin of which she had no share—and she had entire confidence in the efforts that she knew would be made for her release. In effect, her escape was contrived, and so far successfully, that she got clear of the convent—but was immediately pursued, traced, and taken.

“A few weeks before I left my convent for Albano, I received, from the hands of Isidore, a *request* (which was in fact an order) from the very highest authority that I would receive sister Camilla into my community. No allusion whatever was made to her former life; but it was stated that circumstances made it desirable for her to change her convent—the name of which, however, was not mentioned. She came—and, as I before stated, her sadness, her appearance of ill-health, and her general manner interested me. When I re-

turned yesterday, I knew no more of her, than you did. You remember that one of the nuns came to the parlour while we were sitting there together, and that I dismissed you. Her visit was for the purpose of informing me, that many strange surmises had arisen, during my absence, respecting sister Camilla. It seems that the community is divided into two distinct factions—the one being of opinion that the unhappy creature was about to be a mother—and the other, that she shows symptoms of insanity, and a wish to destroy herself. I immediately summoned all those to whose opinion and judgment I thought I could pay the most attention, and till vespers, I was engaged in this examination; though without being able to ascertain that there was any reasonable foundation for either opinion. I determined to see and converse with Camilla; but felt that I should not be justified in stating to her, suspicions so vague, yet so terrible. When I was about to leave the refectory, after supper, she suddenly approached me, and asked in a voice that was scarcely audible, if I would per-

mit her to speak to me—I brought her hither—and she told me a tale of such wickedness and such woe, as I am willing to hope has seldom been equalled. Alas! Juliet, the suspicions of her companions^{are} are but too well-founded. In two months the unhappy creature will be a mother.”

“What then will be her fate? Have I not heard of dreadful punishments——Oh, my dear aunt! what will become of her?——What will become of you?”

“Ay, Juliet,” replied Geraldine, turning very pale, “there is a punishment——”

“But not here? You will not let it fall upon her here?”

“My child! my own Juliet!” exclaimed the Abbess, with great emotion,—“it never shall, as long as I retain life, and power to prevent it.”

“But tell me the worst,” cried Juliet, trembling violently,—“tell me what is the sentence?—and what may they do to you, if you forbid it?”

“Have you ever heard those frightful mocking words, ‘Requiescat in pace?’—and do you know their horrid meaning?”

Juliet’s only answer was hiding her pale face in the bosom of her aunt. Who, in those days but had heard of that living death?—its hideous preparation?—its maddening stillness?—its dark, cold, lingering agony? Who had not heard that the young, the lovely, and the gentle, had been laid a conscious corse, within a loathsome tomb, for being found in the same state as that of Camilla?

“Look up, dear Juliet,” said her aunt, “look up—it shall never be. They may burn me at the stake—but they cannot make me look on such a sight as that.”

“Can it not be concealed? Who knows her condition?”

“No one knows it—though many have spoken of its being possible——It will, I think, be easy to turn this aside.—They are still doubtful, which of the two suspicions that are afloat has most probability. I have but to say that I believe

her mad—and the other idea will die away within an hour.”

“Then for heaven’s sake delay not—I will leave you—shall I send any one ——”

“Stay, Juliet—you must not leave me yet—you forget, dear child, that this report, though I may be able to stifle it for a moment, must revive again—the slightest accident—increased indisposition—a moment’s weakness, and she is lost!”

“Oh true! most true!” exclaimed Juliet with a shudder.

“We must instantly prepare to profit by the interval I hope to obtain. She must leave the convent—but should I send her forth in her present situation, without some one to protect and assist her in her need—I should hardly save her by it. Camilla tells me that there is one person, and one only, that she could freely trust to—this is the woman who nursed her; she lives at Rome, but could we bring her here, Camilla would be content to trust herself to her activity, courage, and well-tried affection. She doubts not, that the count her husband is already in

England. His property had been fortunately sent thither before the sentence of banishment was uttered against him, and till she can meet him, she shall be hospitably received in the mansion of my uncle."

"All this is easy—the difficulty is to communicate with this nurse, Jacintha Corri. I can trust to no courier—I have long known that nothing sent from me, to Rome, arrives there unsearched. Sometimes banditti stop my couriers—sometimes they lose their dispatches where they repose—and many other accidents occur—but always terminate by some fortunate chance, which restores the lost papers—the men themselves, and all those to whom they recount these wonderful adventures, are lost in astonishment at their frequent recurrence—I have never helped any one to interpret the marvel—but I take care to write nothing that Isidore Bartone may not read.—This summons to Camilla's nurse must not be sent by me—and here it is, dear Juliet, that I think your page may be of most precious service. Think you not that he may

be made to understand the strait that we are in, sufficiently to bear our message safely to Jacintha Corri?"

"Be very sure he may—let him but understand that your safety rests upon his caution, and you will find both his fidelity and his sharp wit will stand the test of service."

"Then we will lose no time—seek poor Camilla, my dear Juliet—and bring her to me—I will send for Morgante, and as soon as we have, between us, made him fully aware of the real business of our embassy, I will sit down to write such letters for my friends at Rome, as may pass freely."

Juliet hastened to execute this commission, and returned almost immediately with Camilla; nor did the search for the page take long; the Abbess's message found him surrounded by elderly recluses, whom he was amusing by his conversation; which, as it was garnished on this occasion with all the learning, and all the holy saws he had ever heard from Father Laurence, seemed little less than miraculous to the good nuns.

CHAPTER XXII.

The good I stand on is my truth and honesty.

SHAKSPEARE.

WHEN the little council were assembled, the Abbess, who had previously explained her object to Camilla, addressed the page with an inquiry of—how he had passed the night?—if he had breakfasted well?—and the like. She was not unconscious of the imposing effect of her usual manner, and was desirous of setting the boy at his ease, before they opened to him the important business in which they required his aid.

The careless indifference expressed by the countenance of Morgante, contrasted strangely with the anxious looks of the three females; and

poor Camilla, as she fixed her eyes on the puny stature and childish air of the boy, sighed as she thought how desperate that hope must be, which rested for success on the power and will of such an agent.

Juliet read her thoughts, and giving her aunt a look, which she interpreted rightly to mean—
Let me settle it with him,—she called the boy to her, and taking him by the hand, said slowly and gravely—

“Listen very attentively, my dear Morgante, to what I am going to say to you ——”

In an instant, the whole bearing and manner of the boy were changed.—He raised his eyes to the face of his young mistress, with a look of such deep interest and keen attention, that before he had spoken a word in reply, Camilla raised her head from the hand with which she had supported it, and looked and listened till hope seemed once more awakened within her.

Juliet stated the case exactly as it stood; and though at the first moment of her doing so, both the Abbess and Camilla started, and exchanged

a glance of doubt and alarm, a very short time sufficed to convince them, that Juliet knew well what she was about. After listening to the whole, including the task he was to perform, in perfect silence, Morgante stepped across the room, to where the pale and sorrow-stricken woman sat, whose life was now trusted to his discretion. There was something very touching in the manner in which he changed the clear shrill treble of his usual tone, almost into a whisper as he said,—

“Lady—I would to God that you had a stouter friend to help you in this matter—but for truth and good will——Do not fear, dear lady, to trust to my young mistress——She would not speak as she has spoken——she would not let you trust this message to me, if there were any danger in your doing so.—Teach me the words I am to say; let me repeat them to you, that I may know I have learnt them rightly; and after that, I will carry them to Rome, and bury them in the ears of your nurse.”

Camilla was completely reassured—and so

great was the change from utter hopelessness to the chance of escape that was now opened to her, that she no longer seemed the same being. Her opinion of Morgante's fitness for his embassy was now stronger than ever her doubts had been; and throwing aside all restraint, she stated fully all the horrors that awaited her, were she disappointed in her present hope; and all the confidence she felt in being able to escape these, if Jacintha would come to her.

The Abbess and Juliet spoke not a word, but both felt that the newly awakened courage of Camilla, and the shrewdness of their little agent, justified the most sanguine hopes for the success of their scheme.

Having fully possessed the boy of what she wished him to say, and heard him repeat it with punctilious exactness, Camilla rose, and approaching the Abbess, and her niece, attempted to speak of thanks—and eternal gratitude; but her heart was much too full, and she left the room, to indulge in the solitude of her cell the new

and almost delightful feelings which the scene had given birth to.

The Abbess then instructed Morgante in the other parts of the character he was to assume.— In this, there was no great difficulty. The courier was to have charge of him till he was placed in the hands of the person to whom he was recommended by a letter from herself, whose palazzo was so near the residence of *his aunt*, Jacintha Corri, as to render his getting to her perfectly easy. His pronouncing the name of the Countess di Mondello, would at once secure his reception by her, and when once with her, the remainder of his task would be easy. The ostensible motive of his journey was to be stated in a letter from the Abbess to a distinguished friend at Rome, recommending his fine voice, as a valuable acquisition to the private chapel of the Vatican. This fine voice (which by the way he really possessed), he was suddenly to lose by a cold, caught on the journey, and his aunt Jacintha was herself to bring him back, without

delay, to the protection which the Abbess stood pledged to afford him. Jacintha Corri had in her possession a considerable sum of money belonging to the Countess di Mondello, which had been provided for her last ill-starred escape, and thus all contingencies appeared to be provided for.

Whatever Geraldine d'Albano undertook, was performed with a promptitude and rapidity, which often gave her the appearance of possessing means of action, equal to her will; and this peculiar characteristic of her mind had greatly increased the idea generally conceived of her extraordinary power and influence. Before the hour of noon, her letters were written; her courier and his powerful horse ready to start, and Morgante, furnished with a pillion, which would render his seat behind him both easy and secure.

When the community assembled in the refectory for dinner, the travellers were already on their road; and the Abbess, her young niece, and the unfortunate object of their anxious care, felt as if half the difficulties which had encompassed them the night before, were already surmounted.

The Abbess recommended to Camilla, carefully to conceal the happy change which had taken place in the state of her spirits; to continue her lonely rambles under the mulberry trees, and to confirm the idea of mental derangement, as far as she could do so, without drawing too great a degree of attention upon her. Immediately after dinner Geraldine ordered some of the oldest, and most, influential among the nuns, to attend her, and having indulged them, by listening to all their own conjectures respecting Camilla, she gave it as her decided opinion, that the unfortunate nun was not in her right senses, but that it would be cruel and unchristianlike to act upon this belief, till they were very sure it was well founded. She therefore requested them all to use their influence with the younger part of the community, that no mention of this melancholy suspicion should be made at the next visit of the Abbot—nor even, if it could possibly be avoided, any allusion to it uttered in confession.

The Abbess, as she had anticipated, found no

great difficulty in calming the alarm that had begun to spread through the convent. The elder nuns, among whom it had arisen, were sufficiently discreet to confine their speculations upon it to those of their own standing. There was, however, one opinion, which prevailed generally through the convent, and this was, that sister Camilla was unhappy. Some members of the society, who loved the terrible, had hinted an opinion, that she intended to destroy herself. Her long solitary walks, her avoidance of all conversation, and the unvarying sadness of her countenance, were all stated to be proofs of an infirm state of mind, very likely to lead to such a result. To this suggestion, the Abbess of course listened with great appearance of attention; but constantly repeated her injunctions, that they should patiently wait for the development of further symptoms, before they openly expressed their opinions.

This, she well knew, would be quite sufficient to render mystery on the subject the fashion throughout the whole establishment. The mut-

tered consultations, the gossiping committees, and the whispered forebodings, that she was well assured must take place, would only tend to confirm the impression which it was her wish to spread, respecting the unfortunate object of her anxiety.

It was the same sister Agatha, who had first mentioned to the Abbess the suspicion of poor Camilla's pregnancy, that now became the principal organ of the rumour which succeeded.

As soon as the conference with the Abbess was ended, sister Agatha repaired to the cell of her most familiar friend, sister Maria, and found her engaged with two others in a close and deep discussion on the very subject which she now came to enlighten. The words she heard on entering were,—

“It is not for holy women like ourselves, sister Margaretta, to pretend to understand such matters; but, in holy truth, I believe that the devoted creature is—as no nun can be—and live.”

“Talk not so wildly, good sister,” said Agatha,

sitting down among them,—“ I came but now from the Abbess.”

“ And what says she? for the love of God, tell us all you have heard.”

“ She says,” replied Agatha, “ exactly what so good and gifted a person might be expected to say—exactly what I always thought myself.”

“ Then it is so !” said sister Margaretta, mournfully.

“ Yes, indeed, is it,” returned Agatha. “ I wonder any one of you could ever have made a question on the subject. To see the wild look of her poor eyes is quite enough.”

“ Is that a symptom, sister Agatha ?” asked Maria innocently.

“ To be sure it is; and then her long silent walks under those dark trees ——. She must be watched closely, holy sisters, or it will be all over with her, before we know where we are.”

“ The holy Virgin protect us ! Is it so near then, sister Agatha ?”

“ Near?—Who shall say how near it is ?

Who shall say how soon a poor distracted creature may find the means of putting an end to her life?"

"Distracted?" said all three, in a sort of flattened tone of voice, wherein a fine and subtile ear might have caught a slight, but most strange mixture of disappointment.

"Distracted?" reiterated sister Margaretta.—
"But the other dreadful fear——what says she to that?"

"What can she say, more than exactly what I said myself, sister Margaretta? It is all stuff and nonsense, dear sisters. It was only the folly of that silly woman, sister Madaline, that set the story about."

Her three auditors looked blank ; yet there was nothing approaching to cruelty in the nature of either of them, and the natural substratum of a woman's heart appeared the moment after ; but so strong was the craving, in their stagnant state of existence, for whatever could excite unusual feeling, that any emotion, however terrible, was at the first moment rather welcome than other-

wise. A hurricane is a relief after the horrid stillness of a long deep calm.

“Thank God!” said sister Teresa, after the interval of a moment.

“Thank the holy Mother of Jesus!” said Maria fervently.

“Blessed be all the saints!” exclaimed Margaretta, devoutly crossing herself; “madness is terrible —; but what is that compared to the —.”

“In pace! —” added Teresa, in a low whisper.

“Don’t terrify yourselves by thinking about that, good sisters,” said Agatha; “I believe our mother is not over well-pleased that such a notion should be put into circulation. Sister Madaline ought to do penance for having spoken it. Because she went once to take leave of her cousin when she died in child-bed, she fancies that she knows more about all these things than any one else in the community; and that’s a sin of presumption, to say the least of it.”

The four holy gossips then set out, by common

consent, to spread the Abbess's opinion respecting Camilla's state of mind, throughout the establishment; and before they assembled for supper, all the nuns, and most of the novices, had been made acquainted with all she had said, and a great deal more.

While this discussion was affording occupation to nearly the whole convent, Geraldine, relieved from the first deadly terror which the confession of Camilla occasioned her, invited Juliet to walk with her on the terrace that overlooked the sea.

“What?—the beautiful terrace we saw from the water?” inquired Juliet. “How strange it is, that I should so completely have forgotten it! But where is it? I have been in many rooms, but have seen none that overlook it.”

“There are none, Juliet. It would hardly satisfy the jealous caution of the church, could her devotees hold such free communion with the world, though only with their eyes, as such a prospect would permit. No; we have no

rooms that overlook the Adriatic. The range of windows, which you saw as the vessel passed, were those of the chapel."

"And do you pass through the chapel to reach the terrace?" inquired Juliet, observing that her aunt led the way towards it.

"I might answer both yes and no to that, Juliet, for either would be true. We must enter the building of which the chapel makes part, and yet we do not pass through the chapel. This passage," she continued, putting a key into the lock of a small door, which immediately yielded before her; "this passage was constructed, I believe, merely for the workmen who might be required to keep the building in repair, for it leads only to a rude chamber where ladders, tools, ropes, and other lumber are deposited. The chapel is to the right of us; and here," she added, advancing into the lumber-room she had described, "here are various doors, which give access to different parts of the building. This one, I believe, leads up to the belfry and the leads; this opens directly into the chapel, behind

the massive monument of our founder, which serves to conceal it; and here," advancing to a small archway, "we shall find that which is to conduct us to the terrace."

With the same key she now opened a low and narrow door at the foot of a steep flight of steps; after mounting a few of which, Juliet felt the fresh sea breeze from above, and, quickly clearing the rest, she stepped out upon a broad terrace, flanked by the graceful lancet windows of the chapel, on one side, and overlooking the sunny waves of the Adriatic, on the other. She uttered an exclamation of surprise and delight, as she looked out upon the view that the spot she stood upon commanded. Ancona, with its grove of masts, its towers, and its castle, were visible at the distance of two miles; but the clear bright atmosphere, through which she saw it, gave it the appearance of being much nearer.

"You do not think I praised my walk too much, Juliet?"

"It would be impossible!—how delicious is this shade, when all the rest of the world seems

in broad sunshine ! Well may you love this walk, my dear aunt."

"It is because I do love it so much, that I come to it by the obscure passage I have shown you. You look as if you thought this a strange reason—but I can easily explain it. It is at this end, to which we are now approaching, that the regular and handsome approach to it is situated. Under this arch, which, as you perceive, is made to correspond with the range of chapel windows, is a door-way, leading from the gallery by which the Abbot of St. Andrea enters his seat, when he attends mass in our chapel. This gallery runs from the public corridor at the top of the great staircase, and I could hardly enter it without the chance of meeting some poor weary-looking nun, who would give one of her fingers to join me in my walk. But not to mention that this would greatly destroy my enjoyment, I really could not permit it, without running the risk of a reprimand from our visitor the Abbot, and therefore I have decided not to put myself in the way of being tempted to it, by the beseeching

eyes of my poor recluses. It is for this reason that I almost always make use of this obscure approach, which effectually secures me from any chance of meeting them."

"Poor things!" said Juliet, as she looked over the balustrades upon the bright and wide expanse of the sea, "I really pity them for this privation. Have they never, then, looked upon this lovely view?"

"They enjoy it twice in every year; and perhaps the more keenly, Juliet, because it comes no oftener. There are two religious festivals,—one, that of the Assumption, on the 15th of August; and the other, somewhat less splendid, in honour of John the Baptist, on the 24th of June,—which are celebrated by a procession of barges from Ancona to Case Brugiate. On these occasions, our whole community come out upon this terrace, and sing a hymn as it passes. The balustrades are hung with pictures, tapestry, and innumerable garlands of flowers; and the preparing for these galas is, to our idle household, quite as great a source of enjoyment as the

pageants themselves. But now, my dearest Juliet, let me speak to you on a topic, which I should not have delayed even thus long, but for the sad business which has occupied me since yesterday. I had ^{not} meant to have slept, after bringing you under my own roof, Juliet, without conversing with you upon a subject the most important to which human beings can turn their thoughts. Tell me, my love, and speak wholly without fear, has your confessor made you acquainted with the great truths of religion?"

"My confessor has taught me," replied Juliet, "to repeat many prayers, to attend, as regularly as may be, the offices of the chapel, and to confess all my sins to him once every month."

"Do you understand the prayers you repeat, or those you listen to?"

"I do not," answered Juliet, colouring.

"You have heard much of the reformed religion, my dear child; do you understand what its doctrines are?"

"I believe so."

"Explain them to me."

“ They are doctrines which must doom—as Father Laurence says, but as I do not believe—all who believe them, to eternal punishment.”

“ And the catholic religion, Juliet, what are its doctrines ?”

Juliet burst into tears.

“ Ought I to know all this, my dearest aunt ?” she said.

“ Assuredly, my love,” replied the Abbess.

“ Then may the God of mercy forgive me !” said Juliet, with great emotion, “ for, alas ! I know nothing of it.”

“ Fear not that I should mislead you, Juliet—I understand that look, dearest—I know you cannot fear it. But darkness, deeper than that of midnight, envelopes your spirit. Have you strength to bear the light ?”

“ If you will let it in upon me, my only friend—I am conscious of my ignorance—I feel how unworthy the religious instruction I have received, is of the great subject it pretended to teach me.—I would worship the God that made

me, in the way that should please him best—and you shall teach me that way. Ignorant as I am, I feel assured that with you, I am safe. My happiness in this life—my salvation in that which is to come—are in your hands. Had I any pledge yet dearer, most willingly would I give it, to prove how entirely I love and trust you !”

Geraldine was deeply affected.

“ It is an awful pledge, my Juliet,” she said, after a moment’s silence ; “ but I should be false alike to Heaven and to you, did I refuse it. May the God who has preserved me for this happy hour, through so many years of danger, lead you, by my hand, to the altar where my dear mother worshipped Him ! This, Juliet, is my first, I could almost say, my only wish on earth.”

It was impossible that eyes and voice could speak more affection, than did those, with which Juliet answered this assurance. The few words which had just passed between them, were in truth a great comfort to both ; the last barrier to their

perfect unity of thought and feeling was removed, and, notwithstanding the difference of age, both equally felt this happiness.

“ One short month ago,” said Geraldine, “ I dared not hope that I should ever again taste the pleasure I now enjoy. My situation has been one of frightful restraint; and but for the persuasion that I was doing good to many, whose fate was still sadder than my own, I could not have supported it.”

“ And these poor nuns, my dear aunt, do none of them know—have none ever known and shared your principles?”

“ Not one, Juliet. Could I, by the sacrifice of my life, have turned this dreary abode of heartless superstition, into a society of happy grateful worshippers of the bounteous God of nature—could I have led them in safety and in freedom to a pure protestant altar, I would have done it, though I had mounted my funeral pile the hour after. But I had no such power. I might have spoken the words of God to some, who I think would have listened to me;—but I

could not do it, without exposing them to the risk of persecution, tortures, and death. I find no law of Christ that warrants such an act."

"But has not the witnessing a superstitious worship been a constant source of unhappiness to you?" said Juliet.

"Far from it.—A mind sincerely devout, my dear Juliet, will find in every religion that invokes the living God, too much in common with its own feelings, to experience any repugnance at witnessing its ceremonies. At least, such are my feelings. There is but one state of mind on this subject which I cannot tolerate. The absence of all religion leaves man a monster—and it is rather instinct, than judgment, that makes us loathe him——. No, Juliet, the joining my voice to those of my innocent, but ill-taught nuns, has never caused me to pray less fervently. Think not, that I could profane an altar dedicated to God, by kneeling in impious mockery before it. Whether within the

walls of that chapel, or here, beneath the vault reared in its perfect beauty by His own indulgent hand, I am equally before Him."

"I can understand that," replied Juliet; "but there are circumstances in your situation, which are still inconceivable to me. How is it, beloved friend, that with principles so totally at variance with those of all around you, you have contrived to obtain the reputation of being the strictest and holiest Abbess of the age?"

"By honestly deserving it, Juliet. The duties of the Roman Catholic religion are no where more regularly attended to, or performed with more ready obedience, than in my convent. Were it otherwise, I should be very criminal. I had not the power of conferring the blessing of my own religion upon them, but I have laboured incessantly to confirm and strengthen their trust in God, and their Saviour, and to guard the due performance of the rites, with which their fathers worshipped Him."

"But surely many other superiors may be

found, who are equally observant in these respects, yet no name resounds through the catholic world like yours."

The Abbess smiled.

"You are a close inquirer, Juliet, and the answer to your question involves what I believe to be the great secret in the art of governing. It is not strict discipline, which produces rebellion; but the vexatious interference of power, on points where its exertion is unnecessary. To define correctly where the exercise of authority would be advantageous, and where it would not, was my first study. The religious observances being exactly performed, and the rule of the convent punctually obeyed, I have interfered no farther than might serve to show the affectionate interest I take in the welfare and happiness of each and all of them. Another of my secrets is, that I never dispense with the laws by which I profess to govern. The regulations of the establishment have not been changed in any very essential points, since I became the superior; like those of most others, they are wise and beneficial to

all—my great innovation has been, the taking care that they were invariably followed. Before I had been Abbess a week, my nuns discovered that such was my purpose—and I have had wonderfully little trouble about it since. A punishment that is known to be inevitable, is either not incurred, or quietly submitted to; add to this, that I never had a favourite, and you are in possession of my whole mystery.”

The bell for vespers began to ring, as the Abbess spoke the last words, and Juliet uttered an exclamation, expressive of regret that their walk must end.

“It shall be renewed to-morrow, dearest,” said the Abbess cheerfully. “I guessed well that you would love this spot as dearly as I do. This shall be our school and our temple, Juliet; and it is here that I hope to find what will console me for my long long fast from the delightful intercourse of unrestrained confidence.”

Geraldine now approached the principal door which opened upon the terrace.

“We will return this way, Juliet,” said she,

“and I will pass into the chapel by the little staircase by which our visitor descends from his seat to the altar, when he chooses to receive the sacrament of communion with us.”

“And does the same key open it, aunt?—how very convenient that is.”

“This instrument is the master-key to every lock in the building—by this I can enter every cell, at all hours of the day or night. It opens, too, the grates of our vaults, and from those sombre chambers to the comfortable kitchen buttery, I can pass with equal facility, and assurance that nothing can stop me.”

“And where do you keep this important instrument?” inquired Juliet, laughing: “if you will tell me that, I shall fancy that I can march off whenever I like.”

“You ask in jest, Juliet; but I shall answer you in earnest, and do not forget what I tell you. This key, when it is not in my hand, is always placed on the bottom shelf of the stand in my sitting room, whereon are laid the letters and papers that are set aside from my writing

table. I keep it thus ready to my hand, in case of fire ; and I am not sorry to have a confident in this too—though I hope no such calamity is likely to befall us.”

They now separated—the Abbess entering the door which led to the chapel, and Juliet pursuing her way down the great staircase to the room where the novices assembled to wait for Marcella, part of whose duty it was to accompany them into chapel.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Even about it now—I will pardon you.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE courier, with whom Morgante left the convent, was a stout soldier, named Michael Gatzö. He was armed to the teeth, and so well mounted, that the additional weight of the page was an incumbrance of no great consequence.

Luckily for the petted child, who had never before been beyond the reach of partial kindness, and of female care, the rough-looking soldier was kind-hearted.

“Sit you easily, my lad?” said he, after they had trotted the first mile of their long

journey.—“This is a rough pace for limbs so tender as yours.”

“Fear not for me, signor soldier,” answered the boy, boldly; “if I have never trotted on a war-horse, I have tried a wild gallop, as my lord Count’s Jennet can tell: I fear not a horse, good signor soldier, at any pace you can put him to.”

“That’s well, my man,” replied Michael, “then we may hope to do the reverend lady’s bidding, and that was to make all speed—yet your bones shall fare never the worse for it.”

“Disappoint not the good lady for me, Signor Michael; if your horse will go as fast as I would have him, the church shall have no cause to complain of your neglecting her business.”

Nothing could tend more to the establishing a good understanding between the fellow travellers than this discovery of kindness on the one part, and fearlessness on the other. Morgante exerted all his talents to amuse his companion, and his success was so great, that before they had proceeded many miles, Michael interrupted him

by declaring, that if he made him laugh so immoderately, he should hardly keep Baiardo from stumbling in the road they were in.

“ Well, then, Signor Gatzto,” said Morgante, “ I will tell you no more stories of Father Laurence and the Count, till the way be smother; but I may sing you a song, I suppose. There is nothing makes a road so long, as keeping silence. If I have nothing else to do, I must set about counting how many times your Baiardo’s feet go, knock, knock, knock, between tavern and tavern, and think how tedious that would be.”

Without waiting for any answer to this proposal, Morgante began to carol forth some stanzas of a true love ditty, with all the strength of his clear shrill voice, and so intent was he in singing, and his comrade in listening to him, that a stranger, who was following almost at their horse’s heels, continued to do so for some time, without being perceived by either of them. At length, the boy having paused to take breath, the sound of the hoofs behind caught his ear,

and, making a considerable exertion that his tiny fist might be felt in the soldier's back, he induced him at last to turn his head.

On doing so, Michael perceived a horseman, who, though not wearing the dress of a soldier, was conspicuously, and rather ostentatiously, armed at all points. This person, on receiving Michael's civil salutation, pushed forward to his side, and entered into conversation.

“Have you still far to ride, my friend?” said he: “that cloud looks threatening, and it will be well if we can get under shelter of those chestnuts yonder, before it bursts upon us.”

Michael, who had really been too well amused to think of the weather, now looked about him, and perceived that they had truly a good chance of being wetted to the skin.

“Hold fast, boy,” said he to Morgante, “Christina's little wine-house is not a stone's throw off the road, and we will stop there; I was doubting between that and old Carlo's, which is a league further, for our night's lodg-

ing; but that cloud will, I think, settle my choice."

A few heavy drops began to fall, and the two horses trotted out together, as if by common consent, to save themselves from the flood which was about to fall. By the good-will, both of the men and their beasts, they arrived before the door of Christina, just as a tremendous clap of thunder announced that the storm was arrived in good earnest. Having recommended Morgante to the care of the bright-eyed hostess, Michael led his horse to the rude stable that leant against one side of her dwelling, and found his new acquaintance already there, busy in attendance on his beast.

"We are in luck, signor," said he; "the rain falls like the stream at Tivoli; two minutes of this would be just enough to wet us to the skin."

"It will not last," replied the stranger; "a thunder-storm rides the wind, and stays not longer in the same place; I shall not take my valise from the saddle; there is still good time

this evening for another league or two. Is it your purpose to put up here for the night?"

"Perhaps I may do so; it will depend upon the light that shall be left, when the storm ceases. At all events, signor, we shall do well to comfort ourselves, while we stay, with the best cheer that Christina can afford us."

"You say well, friend; if we order our supper together, be sure we shall fare the better for it."

"I willingly consent to that," replied Michael, "and the more so, because, travelling as I do for the service of the church, I am as able, as I am willing, to pay for the best."

Having made such arrangements as the place permitted, for the accommodation of their horses, they entered the house together. Morgante, with his usual adroitness, was already far advanced in the favour of Christina; he had nearly completed the laying out of her supper-table, not to mention the having turned the cakes on the hearth, and drained the water from the salad.

“There will be no need, comrade,” said Michael, observing the active preparations that were going forward, “for us to trouble ourselves about ordering supper, for our good Christina here is getting it ready for us, without any orders at all. This is not the first time I have seen how handy Christina can be; is it, signora? This will not be the first good supper that I have eaten in your house.”

The young woman, who was very handsome, answered civilly, that she hoped it would not be the last; but as she said this, Morgante fancied he saw a smile of intelligence pass between her and the stranger who had overtaken them on the road.

A comfortable supper was placed before them in a very few minutes, and a jug of better wine accompanied it, than could have been expected from the appearance of the house. Morgante was as gay as a lark, and the honest-hearted Michael hardly less so. The stranger, too, though he seemed not of so cheerful a temperament, appeared willing to encourage the mirth

of the little party, by causing their attentive hostess to replenish the jug of wine.

“Do you remember, Christina, the odd adventure that befel my saddle-bags, the last time I baited here?” said Michael.

Christina did not hear him; she was at that moment particularly engaged in attending to the cooking of some eggs, which were to complete the repast.

“’Twas a queer chance that, signor,” continued Michael, addressing the stranger, “as you ever happened to hear of—we were sitting here, a party of three of us, just as we may be now—and I had put my little saddle-bags down on that very bench there under the window—no soul ever went near them—in truth, no one but our good Christina here, was in the room. Well, signor, as soon as we had finished our dinner, for it was dinner we were eating then, I well remember, I got up to take my saddle-bags, and be off, for I was going a long way farther that night. But lo! when I looked on the bench, no bags could I see.—The place was hunted

high and low, up and down, in doors, and out doors—when just as I was going to ride back to Ancona in despair, somebody came running out to me to the stable, saying that my saddle-bags were just exactly ^{at} where I had put them—and so ^{they} were, sure enough—and glad enough was I ^{when} I found them, for they contained dispatches of prodigious importance to some of the Cardinals, or to the Pope himself—I have taken care not to get such another fright, for now I have my dispatches fastened up safely in the bosom of my buff jacket.”

Again the sharp eye of Morgante caught the look of intelligence, as it passed between Christina and the stranger; and it happened that he perfectly understood it. At the moment that he was about to mount his pillion for this expedition, the Abbess had sent for him, and made him understand, that it was highly probable her courier might be stopped on the road—that such accidents had frequently occurred, and that it appeared, from many circumstances, that the only motive for these detentions, was to obtain an

opportunity of examining her dispatches. On the present occasion, haste, as he well knew, was more important than all else, and therefore it was desirable, if any such circumstance occurred, rather to assist, than impede this object. To her courier it was, of course, impossible to give such instructions, but she earnestly desired Morgante to keep this in his mind, and to act accordingly.

Thus instructed, it was not difficult for the boy to divine the meaning of the looks, which he had remarked, between Christina and the stranger horseman; but it was much more so to discover any means of obeying the Abbess's parting instructions. Michael's announcement, that his dispatches were secured upon his person, was at least as embarrassing to Morgante, as it could be to any person whose object it was to examine them.

Unfortunately too, the thunder-storm had completely passed away, and Michael had declared his intention of proceeding, so that the chance of the papers being examined where they

then were, during the night, was lost;—and to put off this operation (which he felt perfectly certain was to take place) till their next halt, might, he thought, throw the business into the hands of less agreeable assistants than the fair Christina.

These considerations took no long time in passing through the brain of Morgante, and it struck him that the only method of obtaining his object, would be, to give the stranger an opportunity of coming to the point at once.

With this view, he affected to feel the exhilarating effects of the wine; pretended to replenish his cup silyly; sang, prattled, and jested, till not only Christina and Michael, but even the grave stranger, laughed heartily.

When he saw that they were all persuaded that he was intoxicated, he began demurely to banter his fellow-traveller on the treasure he carried in his bosom.

“ Ah, Signor Michael Gatzo,” said he, “ are you not a silly fellow now, to tell us that you are carrying hidden mischief about you? Fie

upon it, Signor Gatzo——honest men, that carry honest letters, have no need to hide them in that fashion. I'll be bound it is some treason against the Pope, that you have got so cleverly concealed in your jerkin there——I can sing you a song about just such a trick as yours——”

“ Stop, boy !” interrupted the stranger, “ no more fooling——your wine hath doubtless made you speak the truth in this matter. Good fellow,” he continued, addressing Michael, “ I should be sorry to treat you roughly, for you are a pleasant companion, and I am willing to hope, notwithstanding the strange hints of that young tippler there, an honest man to boot——but look you—I must examine those same letters you carry—I have a warrant for it.”

“ A warrant to see my letters, friend?——that warrant lies in your sword, as I take it, and my licence for resistance lies in mine.”

So saying, he arose from the table, and seized upon his heavy weapon, which he had laid aside on sitting down.

“ Now, friend,” said Michael composedly,

“ I am quite ready to try which is the better man.”

“ This willingness to commence a broil, good fellow, is hardly seemly in one who professes to be in the service of the church ; but I hardly think you will push the business so far, when—your look at this.”

As he spake, he drew forth a parchment bound with black, to which was appended a seal bearing a cross, an olive branch, and a sword ; the well known symbol of the Inquisition.

Morgante screamed, and ran behind Christina. Michael looked grave, and put up his sword.

“ Now hear the words inscribed on this scroll,” said the stranger solemnly :—“ To all whom it may concern—this holy seal gives warning, that the bearer has our authority, power, and command——”

“ Enough, enough, holy sir,” cried Michael, pulling out the Abbess’s packet from his bosom, “ read and examine, in the name of God, and all his saints ; I have no fear that you will find any thing in the writing of the reverend lady

I serve, that will not redound to her honour and glory.”

The stranger received the packet, and deliberately opening it, read through, with great attention, the various letters it contained. Having perused that which related to Morgante, he called him from the place he had chosen to take behind Christina, and looking at him attentively said—

“Are you the boy recommended to sing in the private chapel of the Vatican?”

“I know not well, reverend sir,” replied the boy, affecting terror he was far from feeling, “where I am to sing—her most reverend highness the Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s, as your most reverend eminence hath doubtless discovered by those letters, doth greatly honour and favour me; and for that reason, it is her wish that I should exercise my small talent for singing, where it may serve to help me in the church, to whose service, holy sir, I have been devoted from my birth.”

“Let me hear you sing—Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth,—young sir.”

If it were, as is probable, the intention of this person to entrap the boy, by requiring him to do something he had never learned, he was altogether defeated; for the strength and art, with which the little fellow made those solemn words ring through the humble abode of Christina, startled all who heard him.

“The Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s makes no bad present to his holiness, when she sends your voice, youngster—nevertheless, she might have found fitting preferment for you, nearer home.—But though you sing well, you are a sorry jester. I grieve my friend,” he continued, addressing Michael, “that the wild words of this urchin should have obliged me to an act, seemingly so uncourteous—but, serving so godly a lady, you must know, how precious are the interests of the church to her faithful servants, and will readily excuse an offence occasioned by such a motive.”

“Doubt it not, holy sir,” said Michael respectfully, “I know my duty too well, to find any thing amiss that comes from that quarter.

If this young hair-brain run me into any more such straits, I hope it will be to put me in the hands of such worthy gentlemen as yourself."

Morgante, who appeared perfectly sobered by the adventure, now addressed himself to his good-humoured conductor, and made many apologies for the malapert gaiety, to which the good wine had given rise.

"You must trust me no more with the wine-cup, Signor Michael, or you may catch me saying something more wicked and irreverent still. Good Father Laurence always bade me to beware of wine,—and now I have seen, to my cost, how well he knew me. I hope, Signor Michael, you will ride on a league or two farther to-night; my poor head rings with the noise I have been making: never trust me with the wine-cup again, Signor Michael."

It was quite beyond the strength of the gay-hearted soldier to preserve any displeasure against so penitent an offender, and immediately consenting to his wish of pursuing their

journey, he prepared his horse, paid his reckoning, and took his leave, greatly to the satisfaction of his impatient companion.

As this was the only adventure of any importance which befel our travellers on the road, it is not necessary to dwell longer on the journey. They reached Rome on the evening of the fifth day, without a word of complaint from Morgante, but not without his having suffered considerably from the fatigue their forced marches occasioned him.

The boy appeared before the exalted personage to whom he was sent, but greatly to the zealous churchman's disappointment, he had so completely lost his voice, that his chaunt was more like that of a raven, than of a Christian chorister. The boy, moreover, appeared to be fretful, sickly, and unmanageable, so that he obtained permission to remain with an aunt who lived at Rome, till his voice should recover from the ill effects of his journey. In a word, all difficulties disappeared before his able generalship, and the day but one after his arrival at

Rome, he quitted it again in company with Jacintha Corri and her son.

As this son had not been included in the message brought by Morgante, he stated his fear that his going might not be approved, but was instantly silenced by the tone in which Jacintha answered—

“Would you hinder her foster brother, boy, from stretching out his arm to help her? Where will you find one, who would do what he would do, and suffer what he would suffer, rather than one hair of our Camilla’s head should be rudely severed.”

“Then let him come, in God’s name,” answered the boy; “could he see her as I have seen her, his heart would yearn to help her, even were she a stranger.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

What good is covered by the face of heaven,
To be discovered, that can do me good ?

SHAKSPEARE.

THE day fixed by the Abbot, for giving the habit of a novice to Juliet arrived. The interval had been carefully employed by Geraldine in strengthening the belief, now general among her nuns, that sister Camilla was insane. The unhappy countess was herself prepared to confirm the report, by her answers to any questions the Abbot might put to her; and the only difficulty was, for the superior to sanction this opinion by her own, yet not to speak of it so positively as to suggest the necessity of immediate medical advice, or any extraordinary restraint.

Immediately on the arrival of Isidore, the nuns prepared for the ceremony, which is always hailed as a festival among them, though it is the first step towards condemning a fellow-creature to the same state in which they are themselves languishing. The firmness of Juliet was well sustained throughout. The last words of her aunt, as they parted to take their different places in the procession to the chapel, were—“*Fear nothing,*”—and these were sufficient to neutralize the feeling of terror, which the ceremony was well calculated to inspire.

A collation in the refectory, on the decoration of which many of the nuns had employed themselves, from the time the day was announced, followed the ceremony; and here, as is usual on such occasions, the honours of the day, were all for the new novice. Her place at table was between the stately Abbot, and her own superior, and every eye was turned upon her, as the heroine of the hour.

As soon as the repast was ended, the Abbot, as usual, signified his intention of receiving in

the parlour any of the community who might wish to converse with him, either on their own affairs or those of the establishment.

But few availed themselves of this privilege on the present occasion, and these were entirely from among the elder nuns; the younger ones preferring to enjoy in the garden the additional liberty permitted at this festival, to the honour of conversing with their dignified visitor in the parlour.

One of the duties most universally recognised in all convents, is the bringing before their visitor every thing at all out of the common way, which takes place in the establishment; and, in conformity to this, not one of the recluses who accepted the Abbot's invitation, failed to make mention of the unhappy state of mind, in which they imagined sister Camilla to be. After these conferences were over, (at which the Abbess is seldom present, inasmuch as complaints against herself, and her management, may sometimes chance to form one of the subjects brought forward,) the Abbot desired that

the superior would do him the honour of admitting him to an interview in her private sitting-room.

This was what Geraldine expected, and was prepared for. He began the conversation by inquiring concerning the health of sister Camilla, which, if he remembered rightly, she had mentioned to him, as being in an infirm state.

“ Her bodily health, my lord,” replied the Abbess, “ is, I think, better than at her first arrival here ; but I am sorry to say that I have great doubts, as to whether her mind be in such a state as to render her remaining with us possible.”

“ You wish to dismiss her, holy mother ?”

“ Not so, my lord ; on the contrary, it would give me the greatest pleasure, could our gentle treatment, and constant care, avail to restore her—but I fear——”

“ That such a cure would exceed your power, holy mother ; and that you would, therefore, wish to place her in other hands ?”

“ Should she, my lord, after a tender and

patient experiment of some weeks, continue as she has done since my return, to give decided indications of mental aberration, I certainly think that, for all our sakes, it would be better that she should be removed. Though her name and family have never been mentioned to me, I think your lordship told me that she was nobly born, and highly connected. It can hardly be doubted, that her friends would themselves wish to take charge of her."

The Abbot fixed his searching eyes stedfastly on the face of Geraldine; but she had been too long accustomed to struggle against that look, to quail before it.

"May I see this unfortunate woman?"

"Certainly, my lord.—I would wish you to do so; by so doing, you will be able to judge much better than from any description I can give of her real condition."

"That may be very true, holy mother; and I would willingly form my judgment on the surest possible grounds, before I decide on what must be done with her."

The Abbess summoned a nun, who was waiting in attendance in a neighbouring cell, and desired her to bring sister Camilla to her room.

“Is there any chance that she will resist your command, holy mother?” said the Abbot.

“Not the least, my lord. No one can be more docile and obedient than this poor Camilla, and it is this which leads me sometimes to hope that, by gentle treatment, we may succeed in restoring her. I should not be surprised to hear that she had been exposed to great severity, or violent mental suffering of some kind or other.”

Isidore again regarded her fixedly.

A moment after, the nun who had been sent for her, returned, leading Camilla by the hand.

The Abbot sat silently gazing at her, as she advanced from the door to the place where he was stationed. Life and death were at stake, as she thus exposed herself alone and unsheltered to his eye. She felt this in every throbbing vein; she felt, too, that it was not her life alone that must pay the forfeit, if she succeeded not in

concealing what every sensation made her conscious must be so easily perceived.

Geraldine was awake to all this, and suffered little less than the unfortunate Camilla herself; but she sustained ~~her~~ presence of mind unshaken. When half-way across the chamber, the trembling victim stopped short, and, though at that moment she had not the slightest recollection of the part assigned her to play, her countenance expressed so much wild agony, that the Abbess skilfully availed herself of it, and, suddenly pushing a chair towards her, seated her in it, saying, in a calm and cautious tone of voice, such as would naturally be used in addressing a disturbed intellect—

“Compose yourself, dear daughter. This reverend Abbot is a friend of mine. Sister Camilla will like to see a friend of mine.”

As she said this, she bent over her, and took her hand, which she pressed with an action so strong, though imperceptible, as at once to recall Camilla to herself; and, with a mixture of truth

and art, that brought tears to the eyes of Geraldine, she answered,—

“ Friend?——I have no friend.”

“ God will be your friend, my daughter,” said the Abbot, still examining her with the most earnest attention,—“ God and the holy Virgin will befriend you—if you deserve it.”

“ I will, sir,” replied poor Camilla, still sustaining her part, more by yielding to her agitation, than by affecting any thing foreign to the real state of her mind.

“ Let me hear you converse with her, holy mother,” said Isidore.

“ Did you see our new novice take the habit?” said the Abbess, still pressing her hand strongly.

“ Did I see it?” she replied, looking up in the face of Geraldine;—“ No, I saw nothing.”

“ Does the light hurt your eyes, to-day, my daughter?” inquired the Abbess, drawing her veil forward;—“ She complains much of this, my lord.”

“That can have no connexion, I presume, with mental derangement?” he replied. “You do wrong, holy mother, by enveloping her face and person thus completely; you deprive me of the power of judging of her condition by her general air and appearance.”

The Abbess, who still held the hand of Camilla, felt her tremble so violently, that she began to fear the most fatal result from this scene; and thinking that the most likely means of bringing it to a conclusion, would be leading her to express herself with vehemence, she said abruptly, “Sister Camilla, it is necessary that my lord Abbot here should know exactly how you are, both in mind and body. If you feel ill, my daughter—tell him so. If you are unhappy—let him know it. It is only by knowing your condition, that he can afford you relief.”

It was evident that this speech surprised and puzzled Isidore. For the first time since she had entered, he withdrew his eyes from the face of Camilla, and fixed them on Geraldine. She rejoiced at this, as a relief to the unhappy crea-

ture, who was shrinking under his glance, till her very life seemed withering; but still Camilla spoke not. The Abbess looked in her face—it was ghastly pale, and her closed eyes, and suspended breath, gave dreadful evidence that she was fainting. This was exactly the event of which Geraldine lived in constant fear—the slightest derangement of Camilla's dress must inevitably tell all, and she now felt her in the very act of falling from her arms, before the eyes of the pitiless judge, whose fiat would be double death to the desolate victim, should the fearful truth be made known to him.

In the very extremity of terror, Geraldine cried aloud for help. “She is fainting, my lord abbot—there must be women near her! For holy mercy's sake, seek out some women for me.”

“I will sustain her, holy mother,” said the Abbot, slowly rising from his chair, and approaching them, “while you go, as is more fitting, to summon some of the holy sisterhood from their cells.”

“Not so, my lord,” said the Abbess, recover-

ing herself; “no nun of mine shall be supported in the arms of a man, were he a hundred times the Abbot of St. Andrea—I doubt not but I can myself sustain her, till the faintness passes.” While saying this, Geraldine exerted a degree of strength which she was unconscious of possessing, and raising the insensible Camilla from her chair, she let her sink gently to the ground, then knelt beside her, and, while rubbing her hands and chafing her pale temples, concealed her person more completely than any other attitude could have permitted.

The danger was past—and the Abbess raised her eyes, again radiant with hope, to Isidore. She was about to utter some civil words of apology for the vehemence she had betrayed, when the sight of his countenance stopped, and almost petrified her—for a sneer of hatred, scorn, and defiance, met her glance, which carried instant conviction to her heart, that he suspected the truth.

He probably saw the effect he had produced, for he instantly endeavoured to efface it.

“It is evident, holy mother, that there is nothing the matter here, beyond a little female weakness: I will leave you, and should any symptoms appear, which you deem it proper I should be acquainted with, fail not to let me know it, and I will immediately take measures that proper medical assistance shall be procured for her.”

So saying, he uttered a blessing, which to the ears of Geraldine sounded like a curse, and departed.

It would be difficult to conceive a situation of more agonizing doubt and fear, than that in which he left the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's. She felt perfectly convinced that he suspected the truth; but thought that, could she achieve the escape of Camilla before her situation was known to the community, it would be out of the power of Isidore to prove that she had ever been made acquainted with it. But how was this escape to be effected? A day's delay might be fatal; yet when she looked at the death-like figure which lay before her, and recollected that to place her alone, unprotected, and helpless, beyond the

convent walls, was the very farthest extent to which her power went, Geraldine clasped her hands together in the bitterness of grief, and exclaimed,—“ We are lost !”

Camilla, whose senses were sufficiently returned to understand the full meaning of these fearful words, lay for some moments longer without giving any sign of having heard them; then raising herself from the ground, she addressed the Abbess with the hard firmness of despair.

“ All then is over with me. I submit to my fate—the struggle is past—you will hear me complain no more. But no one,” she continued, while a shivering tremor ran through her frame, “ no one, but my babe, shall suffer with me.—Make no farther effort—it must be vain—express no regret, no pity—it must be useless.—Let me go to my cell, and I will lie there till they carry me to ——”

She did not finish the sentence, but rising with a composure that was frightfully unnatural, walked towards the door.

The Abbess followed her.

“ You shall not go with me,” said Camilla, turning suddenly round. “ As long as there was a chance of saving Mondello’s child, I was willing you should risk something—but now—look at me for the last time, Geraldine—and let no one, but the God of Mercy know that you have pitied me.”

She left the room, and the Abbess, too intently occupied in weighing the possibility of saving her, to think of her present weakness, let her go alone.

Geraldine paced the room in feverish anxiety; innumerable plans, rejected as soon as conceived, for all were alike impossible, chased each other through her aching head. Three days only had elapsed since the departure of Morgante, and it was beyond hope that he should return with Jacintha in less than ten; though, among the other injunctions impressed upon his memory at parting, one the most dwelt on was, that no gold or strength should be spared to expedite their return. Jacintha was to travel as the wife of a rich merchant, coming to Ancona to await

the return of her husband from an English voyage; which character would enable her to take a passage for herself and Camilla for any port in England, under pretence of joining him there.

But Geraldine no longer felt a hope, that it would be possible to put off the dreaded discovery till her arrival. The Abbot might return on the morrow to examine into her condition; and before he came, it was probable her real state would be known to every member of the community.

While still vainly torturing herself to find means of escaping the misery now pressing so closely upon her, the Abbess suddenly heard an unusual noise at the farther end of the passage which led to her door; steps were passing hastily, and many voices were to be distinguished in loud parley.

Trembling lest this unusual tumult should have some connexion with the subject that occupied her thoughts, she hastily left her room,

and, guided by the noise, which still continued, she hurried towards the spot from whence it came; and in a moment a scene met her view, which left her nothing farther to fear. On the floor, where she had sunk, from a return of faintness, lay Camilla; her dress loosened to give her air, and her whole person exposed to the gaze of twenty or thirty nuns, who stood apart, as if afraid to touch her, and whose number was increasing every moment. These women were on either side; but, directly before her, and close to her feet, stood the Abbot of St. Andrea's, with his eyes fixed upon her, as if fearful that, should he remove them, he might lose his prey.

A murmur among the nuns announced the approach of the Abbess, Isidore turned his head, but remained silent, till she was close beside him—then pointing with his finger to Camilla, who was again awakening to the misery of consciousness, he said—

“ If you will look upon this woman now, holy

mother, you will no longer be perplexed, in the manner you just now expressed yourself to be, respecting the cause of her indisposition.”

Every eye was turned upon the Abbess as he spoke; but she was no longer the trembling woman that the struggle between hope and fear had lately made her; she was at once restored to the most perfect composure; and the commanding dignity of her person and manner never appeared more conspicuously, than when she replied to the Abbot,—

“This sight, my lord, is equally dreadful and unexpected. The punishment and shame of this unhappy creature must rest upon herself; but the scandal is with those who have dared to profane these walls by sending her within them.

I may live to see them repent it.”

Then turning towards the crowd of nuns, she waved her hand and said—

“Retire, my children; this is no sight for you. Go each of you to your cells, and, on your bended knees, repeat aloud—‘Miserere mei, Deus,’ and ‘Domine, exaudi meam.’——

You, sisters Marcella and Agatha, remain with me."

In a moment the gallery was cleared of all but the two elderly women, to whom she had addressed herself. When they were out of sight, she said to these—

"Cover that woman's person—it is offensive to decency."—Then turning to Isidore, she continued,—“My lord Abbot, what is your will respecting her? Though my rule has been too happy to have taught me experience in such a case as this, yet all analogy shows clearly that it must be your office to decide how she shall be disposed of.”

“You say right, holy mother—that office is mine. Touch her not!” he exclaimed, holding up his arm in an attitude of denunciation to Marcella, who, having assisted Agatha in arranging her dress, was endeavouring to place her in an attitude less painful than that in which she had fallen. “Touch her not! Call hither the lay menials of your kitchen—they shall bear her to a cell not lately used.”

The Abbess stood silently observant of his orders. He turned to her with an air of mock respect, and said, "I cannot enough rejoice, holy mother, that my having returned to make known my purpose of visiting you again to-morrow, has saved you the cruel embarrassment of making this horrible discovery, when you had no official authority near to direct your proceedings. I am sure you must be thankful for this."

The Abbess bowed in silence.

"Perhaps, holy mother, you are altogether ignorant of what the church ordains in such cases?"

"Such cases, my lord, are the last which the superior of such an establishment as this, would find it necessary to study."

"Assuredly; yet such is the depravity of human nature, that the church has found it needful to fix and define the punishment to be inflicted on crimes such as this, however impossible it may seem to the female saints of our holy religion that such should ever occur."

“If this be so, my lord,” replied Geraldine, preserving always her look and voice of unshrinking firmness, “your lordship will be spared the painful task of deciding what that punishment must be.”

“You have known me so long, holy mother, that I should have thought you might have been aware, that no task is painful to me, which is imposed by the sacred duties of religion. God has not left me, in this age of heresy, with a heart so soft, as to make me suffer when I do his bidding. No, holy mother, I shall stand by and watch the building up the wall, that shall inclose that creature from the air of life, as cheerfully as any other sacred duty, which it is the will of God I should perform.”

As he uttered these dreadful words, the servants he had sent for appeared. He ordered them to carry Camilla in their arms to the place where he would lead them. Four stout-looking women had obeyed his call; and, by his orders, raised the wretched Camilla in their arms: he stepped forward to marshal their steps; and as

he did so, turned to the Abbess, with punctilious politeness, and said—

“ Though my duty obliges me to take the management of this solemn business upon myself, holy mother, it is ^{my} wish that no part of it, which properly appertains to your own high office, should be omitted; wherefore, I will beg of you to witness the incarceration of this criminal in the prison-vault of this building.”

“ My lord Abbot,” said Geraldine, “ though but a weak and ignorant woman, vested with no greater authority than belongs to the humble Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s, I do forbid these women to convey the nun, Camilla, one step towards the prison-vault of this convent. Carry her to her own cell, Ursula,” she continued, addressing one of the women who bore her, “ lay her with all gentleness upon her bed: then lock the door of the room, and bring the key to my parlour, where you will find me.”

Isidore stood thunderstruck. The women, unchecked by any word from him, obeyed with

alacrity the voice which, for years, had been listened to within those walls, as omnipotent; and they were already gone, before the Abbot had sufficiently recovered himself to speak.

“You are doubtless prepared to answer this before the council, Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s?” said he, at length, struggling to subdue the rage that almost mastered him.

“I am, my lord Abbot—and perhaps we may be told, that it was well one of the two, who are in authority here, preserved sufficient calmness at this moment to insure the course of lawful judgment, by guarding the person of the criminal from all chance of escaping it, as well by death, as by any other mode of evasion.”

Having said this, Geraldine walked away, without waiting for a reply; nor did Isidore follow to make one. The consciousness that she was right, and must be acknowledged, in case of appeal to the highest authority, to be so, added another sting to his envenomed spirit; and it was only by recalling the mass of evidence that he

had already collected against this object of his long cherished hatred, that he could regain that appearance of dignified composure, which so few circumstances had ever been able to ruffle.

CHAPTER XXV.

Nos prêtres ne sont point ce qu'un vain peuple pense.

VOLTAIRE.

*Letter from the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's
to Lord Arlborough.*

“FOR many years, my dear kinsman, you have been in vain urging me to take a step which an accident has now decided me to do. There has been ever too much risk attending our intercourse, from the possibility of letters being intercepted, for me at any time to have given you fully my reasons for refusing what offered so much to tempt me. It was sufficient for me to tell you, that I conceived it my duty to refuse

the happiness proposed me; and little as you could have appreciated my motives, you have done me the kindness to believe that they were honourable. The time approaches when we may hope to know each other more intimately, and I have little fear of finding that our judgments differ. This letter, with neither address nor signature, can endanger no one, but if it reaches you, it will be by the hand of one, for whom I earnestly intreat your active friendship. Let the caution I use in this matter, teach you full confidence in my discretion respecting another, in which you are more tenderly concerned,—on this point, I have never trusted any human being with the knowledge of what might have endangered the safety of those dear to you—though this reserve has, in one instance, been very painful to me. I trust that this will reach you, in time to prevent the danger of a second expedition. I cannot come to you unaccompanied; and the friend I shall bring, will, I think, induce you to conclude the arrangement I wish, more readily than any negociation could

lead you to do. The bearer of this, as well as the friend who, I trust, will still be with you when you receive it, can explain who this dear companion will be.—Farewell.”

To write this letter was the first occupation of Geraldine, upon shutting herself into her room after the scene described in the last chapter; and its tone of assured confidence in her power of achieving what she was bent to perform, will convey a correct idea of the state of her mind.

There are many people who falter and tremble, as long as there is any mixture of doubt in their minds, as to what they can, or what they ought to do, but who, the moment that doubt ceases, have power and will to dare every thing. It was thus with Geraldine. As long as she had believed that it might bring persecution and danger to her family, and unhappiness, nay, perhaps in their case, danger too, on the nuns who for so many years had obeyed and loved her, the Abbess of Sant’

Catherina's resisted the repeated solicitations of her noble English cousin, to leave a station which he knew was repugnant to her principles, and find a home in the country and family of her mother. She had refused this, because it appeared to her, that she only could be the gainer by it, while many others might pay the penalty ; but now the case was altered. Determined at every risk to save the Countess of Mondello from the fate which threatened her, and aware that she could no longer hope to do this, without exposing herself, and perhaps poor Juliet also, to strong suspicion, she decided at once upon taking refuge in England, and carrying her adopted child with her.

More lost to her father, Juliet could not be, than in the situation he had himself chosen for her ; on this point, therefore, the Abbess was tormented by no scruples ; nor could she be said, at the moment of writing this letter, to feel one pang of doubt as to the result of the plan she had formed.

Her authority was still unshaken; and her resources were so great, that her prompt and active spirit, contemplated no obstacle that could be sufficient to impede her success.

In all cases, any way approaching in importance to that of Camilla, it was usual to summon a chapter of the heads of such religious establishments of the same order, as were near enough to permit their attending.

Though this was always done as speedily as possible, after the discovery of the crime, and the seizure of the criminal, Geraldine knew, that such a council as was held necessary, could not be assembled on the morrow. The interval of one day must of necessity intervene, and this was sufficient to give her time for the execution of her purpose. The chamber wherein this council must assemble, according to the ancient usage of the convent, was a small vaulted room of black marble, situated at the western extremity of the chapel. This room, as poor Geraldine was wont to boast, had never been used since

she had become Abbess of Sant' Catherina's, and some preparation was necessary to render it fit for the reception of the chapter.

It was on this circumstance that the first part of her scheme was founded. A provision of tapestry, carpets, and matting, such as were always required upon such occasions, were, together with the tools necessary for arranging them, kept in the lumber-room, through which the Abbess had led Juliet when she took her upon the terrace. The door of this room, when left open, as it naturally would be for a few hours, for the egress, and regress of the people to be employed, would afford opportunity for Camilla, either in going or returning from chapel (an attendance on which was never denied to any culprit before condemnation) to gain access to the terrace. To escape from thence, however, without assistance from without, would be utterly impossible; and it was the purpose of the Abbess, that she should conceal herself within the door leading to the belfry, from the hour of vesper service till midnight, when she would herself

—at all risk of discovery—lead her through the great gate of the convent, the court before it, and the last barrier which opened from this, by an arched door-way, connecting the porter's lodging with some other offices of the building. That they might be seen, intercepted, and brought back together, to certain death, was a chance far from being improbable, but on which, as it must be hazarded, Geraldine wasted not a single thought. In the hope of turning suspicion from the truth, she intended that Camilla's veil should be found caught by the balustrade of the terrace, to suggest the idea that she might have drowned herself, to avoid the more terrible death with which she was threatened.

Having thus far arranged her plan, the Abbess sent for Juliet, whose pale face and tearful eye showed plainly, that she had already learnt the discovery that had taken place.

As soon as they were alone, Juliet's agony of terror, as well for her aunt, as for Camilla, burst forth in words; but the Abbess listened to her, answered her, and reasoned with her—all

with an air of such steady firmness, that she conceived a degree of hope, which, a few moments before, she believed beyond the reach of possibility.

Having thus rendered Juliet sufficiently calm to listen with the attention necessary to make her an efficient assistant in the perilous undertaking before them, the Abbess proceeded to explain to her all the details, by which she hoped to bring it to a happy issue.

“Poor Camilla is so tall, Juliet, that we shall find some difficulty in arranging your clothes for her—and yet, perforce, it must be from such as you brought with you, that she must be dressed.”

“I will instantly set about it, in my cell. God forgive the hypocrisy, but if I lock my door it must pass for my wish to pray alone after the ceremony of this morning. But, dearest aunt! how is Camilla to exist outside these walls? Where can she dare present herself, to ask for shelter or even for food?”

“You will think my policy very daring,

Juliet, when I tell you—but trust me, such policy is always safest—it must be at the gate of the convent that she shall receive her food. At two o'clock, as I believe you know, all the poor of Ancona throng round our gates to receive what has been left from our dinner-tables. It is among these, that Camilla must hide herself—and that for the very reason which makes you look at me now with such astonishment. You would not have thought of her being there—nor will any one else. Be careful, therefore, in preparing the dress that is to cover her, that you give it as sordid and miserable an appearance as possible;—and now leave me, dearest—set about this work immediately. Close your door carefully—I need not bid you be diligent, my Juliet. Be not uneasy, if you do not see me for an hour or two—I have much to do. First, I must see our poor Camilla, and endeavour to inspire her with courage to endure the terror of begging her bread at our gates, and the misery of passing more than one houseless night before her nurse arrives. When that

happens, her sufferings will be changed for joy. —Farewell, my child—as you employ your hands for this good cause, lift your heart to Heaven, Juliet, and pray for a blessing on it.”

The Abbess found Camilla perfectly composed, though without the shadow of a hope that she could avoid the fate which she had long anticipated, and which she had just heard the man, who must be her judge, pronounce upon her.

As Geraldine proceeded to explain her plan, her hopes, and her expectations, the calmness of Camilla gave way. An expression of anxiety, dreadfully intense, again almost convulsed her features; but for many minutes she continued to listen in silence. At length, when the brief but clear explanation of the Abbess ended at the expected arrival of Jacintha, and the means by which she could earliest be made acquainted with it, she passionately exclaimed—

“For the love of God rouse not such hopes within me, if there be much doubt mixed with it. I have taken leave of life—I am ready to

suffer all that man can invent to torture me—and if I feel my infant die within me, I will take joy to my heart, that it is not conscious of the pangs of death. Oh, then, be very cautious how you make me hope.—There is so much to make me doat on life.—To reach Mondello—my dear, noble husband—to shew him his young child—to—”

“Calm this vehemence of feeling, dear Camilla, or all I can do must be in vain;” said the Abbess, rising to leave her. “Did I not myself feel confident that I have still the power to save you, I would not hazard all I do—still less would I be guilty of the cruelty you so naturally deprecate. Much, however, must depend upon yourself. Arouse all your strength of mind—I am sure you possess much—and remember that much more than your own safety will now hang on your success. I will order your supper to be brought you—and after this, which will be the last visit any of the household will make you for the night, I will bring hither the dress that Juliet is preparing. I must then, as

much as possible, avoid speaking to you, lest our voices should be heard, therefore let me now confide this letter to your care—it is without signature or address, for fear of accidents, but forget not, that it is for the Lord Arlborough—the name is address sufficient, if you can reach England. There is no part of it, where you could not learn where you may find my honoured uncle. Do you think you can remember this name?”

“Fear it not, my generous friend;—and for yourself?—Is there no danger?”

“You must not spare a single thought for me, dear child,” replied the Abbess, embracing her. “If you manage well, I shall have little to fear.—One word more—and I must leave you. Remember, that should you shrink from the daily visit which I recommend to the gate of this convent, you must at least not omit it on Friday, Sunday, and the Wednesday following. On these days, some of the community appear themselves to assist the servants in waiting on the poor—Juliet will be among them—it is she who

must find means to give you tidings of Jacintha, —who, as we have every reason to hope, will surely be in Ancona before the last day I have named.”

Geraldine then left her, to give orders for the summons which must be dispatched to the Abbess of St. Ildefonse, at Ancona, and to the Abbot of St. Sebastiano, at a few miles’ distance from it; both being of the order of Dominicans, requesting their attendance at noon on the day after the morrow. She also, according to the usual form, addressed a notification to the same effect to the Abbot of St. Andrea, giving him notice of the day and hour which she had fixed for the trial of the nun Camilla.

Having completed this business, which, in conformity to her usual system, had neither prevented her attendance at vespers, nor the appearing in the refectory at supper, she sat quietly beside her solitary lamp till every sound had ceased, and till, by the regulations of the convent, which, by her firm but gentle rule, she had rendered immutable, she felt assured that

every inhabitant of the convent was retired to rest. Yet still she lingered in her room, anxious to give every partaker in the various emotions of that weary day full time to forget their share of it in sleep. As the chapel clock struck eleven, she arose, and carefully placed such a shade upon her lamp, as would prevent its glaring through a window or a key-hole, and yet, by a slight movement, be removed at pleasure. Thus prepared, she quitted her parlour, and glided noiselessly along the passages which led to the cell of Juliet; that of Camilla, as was before stated, was next to it, but the corner of a gallery intervened between them. The door of Camilla's cell must be passed by the Abbess, before she reached that of Juliet, but she determined not to enter it, till she had obtained the garments prepared for her, as every added sound was an added danger. As she approached the cell, however, some idea that she might be watching for her, crossed the mind of Geraldine, and she paused immediately opposite to it, turning her

lamp at the same moment, so as to throw its full light upon the door.

Geraldine d'Albano did not faint,—she did not fall,—she did not scream; but, with ten times greater suffering than those can feel, whose weaker natures yield to such relief, she stood immoveable, her eyes following the strong light of her lamp, which fell on two motionless figures in black, who were stationed at each side of Camilla's door.

One glance revealed the dreadful truth—they were officials of the Inquisition.

It needed no long meditation to enable her to comprehend the frightful mystery; nor did her rapid interpretation vary in any important point from the real facts. Isidore was, as she had long suspected, an Inquisitor, and armed with that frightful power, which pervades every sanctuary, and makes its way unchallenged to the chamber of the monarch, or the more sacred cell of the devotee.

The Abbot had left Sant' Catherina's, bitterly

mortified by the check his authority had received in the presence of its menials; and not only bent more firmly than ever upon obtaining vengeance on the noble woman who had braved him, but keenly awake to the probability, that she would not suffer the interval so hardily obtained to pass away, without making a desperate effort to save Camilla. His plan for the prevention of this, was speedily formed; he hastened back, with the least possible delay, to St. Andrea's; and, selecting from among such of its retainers, as were in the service of the holy office, two whom he thought especially fitted for the business, he dispatched them to Sant' Catharina's, with orders to find their way to the door of Camilla's cell, and to remain there till their watch should be relieved by others, whom he should bring with him to the convent on the morrow.

Those to whom no information can be refused, and who can insure a silence on their deeds, deep as that of the grave, by merely showing an impression on wax, affixed to a scroll of parch-

ment for ever worn upon their persons, find little difficulty in executing any commission.

The Abbess passed on, bowing her head respectfully, and having paused in her progress for so brief a space, that the sable mutes who glared upon her, were hardly aware that she did so. Her purpose was at once decided. She proceeded to the door of Juliet's cell, and gave the appointed signal—the anxious girl opened it, and welcomed her with an affectionate, but timid smile. Geraldine set down her shaded lamp, and for one short moment concealed her face, and avoided to speak, lest her body might betray symptoms of weakness which her soul rejected.

“I am quite ready for you,” said Juliet in a low whisper, and at the same moment displaying the result of her assiduous industry—“every thing has long been still—let us go at once.”

“I have changed the plan, Juliet,” said the Abbess, in a tone which, spite of all the caution with which it was uttered, made her niece start. Without speaking in return, Juliet immediately moved the shade of the lamp, and threw its

strong light upon the face of her aunt. Had it not been colourless as death at such a moment, it could hardly have been that of a woman.

“Tell me all,”—were the only words of Juliet.

“I will to-morrow, dearest,” replied Geraldine, with the exertion of astonishing self-command.—“Meanwhile, fear nothing—I will convey these things to a place of safety—my purpose is but delayed.”

As she said this, she employed herself in making a parcel of the dress, which Juliet had prepared, and then laying a finger on her lips to indicate the necessity of silence, she kissed her cheek, and was about to quit her, when a frightful recollection made her turn back and say—“Do not leave your room to-morrow, till I come for you—and now, endeavour to sleep, my dearest Juliet.”

On leaving the cell, Geraldine returned to her own room, by walking the whole length of the novices' gallery, and descending from the farther end of it, by a small staircase, to a door, which

opened upon the great corridor of the floor below; thus avoiding the passage in which the cell of Camilla was situated.

On entering her own apartment, Geraldine laid aside the flowing garments which formed her usual dress, and taking her master-key from its place, she hastened with a firm but silent step, still carrying the lamp and the disguise prepared for Camilla, to the small room close to the chapel, through which she had led Juliet to the terrace. Here she deposited the parcel, concealing it in a manner which left but little danger of its being found by any one but herself, or some one instructed by her where to seek it.

Having done this, she entered the chapel, and advanced to a low iron door, situated in the wall of the north aisle. The building was placed on the southern angle of the little bay which forms the harbour of Ancona, and the north side of the chapel presented to the sea the terraced front before described. This iron door, to which now, for the first time, the Abbess applied her master-

key, gave entrance to a range of vaults, on whose arched roofs the terrace above was supported.

Their original purpose was either forgotten, or not generally known, and during the twenty years Geraldine had resided in the convent, they had been opened but once, which was for the purpose of gaining access to the sea-wall which fenced them from the Adriatic. This happened a few years after she had taken the veil, and was rendered necessary by a violent storm which had undermined a part of the foundation. The circumstance was impressed upon her mind by the whispered tales which nuns so love to listen to, although they send them trembling to their solitary cells.

Though spoken of with affected caution, it was pretty generally known throughout the convent, that the workmen, in making their way through these vaults, to that part of the outward wall which required repair, opened more than one of these awful tombs constructed for the living, which are but too well known to have existed in almost every convent throughout the catholic

world. How far the report of these men might be trusted, as to the number of bones found in these hideous recesses, is very doubtful; but it is certain, that notwithstanding the opprobrium resting on the memory of the wretched beings to whom they had belonged, the indecency of such relics being gazed at, and handled, was so revolting to the feelings of the good priest who had been appointed to superintend the repairs, that he obtained permission to have them collected and interred.

It was the recollection of this event which now led Geraldine to examine these gloomy recesses. It was no longer possible to doubt that Camilla would be condemned to that most terrible of all punishments—interment before death; and it could hardly be doubted that these vaults must be the scene where the frightful tragedy would be acted. To study their situation and construction, and to ascertain what facilities of access these afforded, was now the object of her anxious examination. The last remaining chance left for her was in the

possibility of conveying her away after the interment.

It was not immediately that the small lamp carried by Geraldine could enable her to distinguish the objects which presented themselves as she opened the door. The damp cold air that rushed past, very nearly extinguished the light, and, for a moment, she retreated, chilled and trembling—but not discouraged. After carefully examining the state of her lamp, and arranging the shade so as to protect it from the wind, she again went forward with a step as resolute as her purpose.

She found, as she expected, a range of arches corresponding to the external buttresses which faced the water. They were as many in number as the lance windows of the chapel, forming a line of twelve distinct vaults, connected with each other by the narrow passage upon which the door from the chapel opened.

By measuring the width of each of these dungeons, and comparing it with the entire length of the passage, she ascertained that the partition

walls which divided them were too thin to contain the cells whose position she was seeking to discover. It was therefore evident that these must be fabricated in the external wall, which faced the sea. Upon this she now fixed her attention; it was built with large rough hewn stones, cemented together with coarse mortar; but no fastenings, or iron work of any kind, were perceptible, and it appeared to her that one stout man, with proper tools, might, without difficulty, pull down a sufficient space of such masonry, when recently erected, in a very short space of time. That the sound of such an operation should be overheard was improbable, for several reasons; none of the rooms of the convent were near it, and the ceaseless sound of the waves lashing against the walls, would render it very difficult to distinguish any noise heard from that quarter.

Thus far the examination was satisfactory, as it had shown nothing which seemed to render the execution of the plan she meditated impossible, or even difficult; but while she rejoiced at

this, the train of lesser circumstances, which must all conspire in her favour before she could profit by it, came crowding to her recollection. Where should she find the arm so necessary to help her? Where could she attempt even to seek it, without exposing herself to almost certain destruction? How should she find the means of conveying to the wretched prisoner some word of comfort, that might sustain her through that mortal agony which must precede the desperate effort to save her?

As Geraldine stood pondering these fearful difficulties, the pressure upon her brain became almost intolerable, and gladly, at that moment, would she have purchased the safety she had promised to the unhappy Camilla, by laying down her own life without further struggle. But it was not so that this sacred promise could be performed; and shaking off the sickening despondency that threatened to master her resolution, she hastened to leave the dismal region which chilled her blood. On quitting the eternal darkness of the vaults, she was startled to see

the grey light of morning already stealing athwart the deep shadows of the chapel. She extinguished her lamp, and reached her room in safety.

And now, for the first time for many hours, she quietly sat down to think. The stillness of that moment was dreadful. The last words of Camilla, conjuring her not to rouse a false and futile hope of life within her, seemed ringing in her ears; and the immense, the various, the overwhelming difficulties of the enterprise she was resolved to undertake, in the hope of saving her, rose up like giants to give her battle. She could not hope to sleep, and the vainly attempting to do so would, as she well knew, more un-hinge her nerves than the most active work she could put them to. With this persuasion she abandoned all idea of rest, and employed the interval before the service of matins (which at Sant' Catherina's was performed at five o'clock) in arranging, with as much clearness of head as she could command, the chain of circumstances which she knew must follow each other during

the next two days. They were such as might appal the stoutest heart; and when she turned her consideration to the means that were within her reach, by which she might hope to avert their consequences, the disproportion of the remedy to the evil was so obvious, as almost to paralyze every effort. That such would have been the result of this bitter hour's meditation, had her own fate only been at stake, is most certain—but as it was, she took courage from despair; and certain, that nothing she could attempt, however complete its failure might be, could render the situation of Camilla worse, she nerved herself to the desperate undertaking; and from this moment, to that in which its final result was for ever settled, no further symptom of weakness or indecision impeded the steady perseverance of Geraldine.

CHAPTER XXVI.

La vertu n'appartient qu' à un être foible par sa nature, et fort par sa volonté.

J. J. ROUSSEAU.

IN the hope that Juliet might sleep soundly after the fatigue and anxiety she had endured, the Abbess would not visit her before the hour at which it was necessary to awake her for breakfast. She then went to her door, and found her standing with it half open in her hand, waiting with unspeakable impatience for her approach. Had her obedience to the command, which enjoined her not to leave her room, been less implicit, she would not have been still ignorant of the fearful neighbourhood of the men who still

immoveably guarded the door of Camilla. Happily for Juliet, she had scrupulously obeyed the injunction, and though her heart beat with anxiety to know, what events had induced the change of purpose, which her aunt had mentioned the night before, she was still, in her most unpleasant surmises, immeasurably distant from the truth.

It was the earnest wish of Geraldine to keep her so, at least for some few hours longer; she dreaded to see the effect of so much horror on the young and sensitive mind of Juliet, and when she drew her hand under her own arm, its gentle and affectionate pressure sent a pang to her heart as she thought of the sorrow which, delay it as she might, must reach her at last.

“Why do you take this way, dear aunt? I wished to see poor Camilla as we passed,” said Juliet.

“Not now, my love; I wish to keep her quiet for the present, and for that reason I will not pass her cell.”

There was no danger, as Geraldine well knew, that Juliet should hear of last night's discovery from the sisterhood. The knowledge that ministers of the holy office were engaged in any business, was enough, in those days, to impose silence on the most incautious tongue respecting it; and still more would the dreadful consciousness of their vicinity prevent the terrified nuns from trusting the air with any sound concerning it. But, though no word was uttered on the subject, there was something in the looks of the whole assembly, that instantly caught the attention of Juliet. She looked anxiously from one to another, and one after another they all cast down their eyes, to avoid answering hers, even by a glance. She turned to her aunt—she, too, cautiously looked the other way.

The heart of Juliet sank within her—but she caught the infectious silence, and the morning meal passed heavily, without the sound of a single voice being heard while it lasted.

When the Abbess rose from table, Juliet, alike unmindful of general etiquette, and of her

aunt's particular instructions, walked up to her, and took her arm.

"I have much business for these hours, Juliet," said her aunt, gently disengaging her arm—"Occupy yourself in your own cell this morning, my dear child; after dinner, perhaps, I shall have time to see you."

"No, no; I will see you now," replied Juliet: "your mistaken kindness is in vain—you cannot hide it from me."

Geraldine did not answer—and no longer attempted to prevent Juliet's following her.

"Is she still alive? or did the monster complete his work last night?"—were the first words of Juliet, after they had reached the Abbess's parlour.

"She still lives, Juliet; but—to-morrow——"

"To-morrow she is to die?"

"To-morrow she is to stand her trial—and immediate execution will follow."

"You have then abandoned her?"

"Oh Juliet!——"

"Forgive—I mean not to reproach you—but

do you speak in that calm tone of her execution? It must not be, aunt: it shall not be! Where is her prison?"

"Juliet, Juliet, you speak wildly. No, I have not abandoned her. I am determined to attempt, what, my judgment tells me, offers hardly a shadow of hope; but I will not abandon her. Hear then what I propose to attempt, and tell me if within the range of possibility there be any other thing I can do?"

Juliet listened—and as, one after another, the minute particulars of the scheme were detailed, she lost more and more completely the hope that sustained her.

"Impossible! utterly—utterly impossible!" she exclaimed, as her aunt concluded. "Who is there you can trust with such an enterprise? Whom, even, can you find to propose it to?"

"The workmen who will come this morning to prepare the council-room."

"And if they betray you?"

Geraldine was silent for a moment, and then answered—

“ It could not make her situation worse.”

“ And what would your’s be?”

“ Juliet, it matters not—perhaps, my death too is sealed.—I will not live to see this horrid murder.”

“ But this will not avert it,” said Juliet, earnestly. “ Even should you, by this blind chance, find a trusty agent, his single arm could not achieve the work you talk of.”

“ And why not, Juliet?”

Without immediately replying, Juliet rose and sought the master-key in the place where she had so lately been instructed to find it.

“ Come with me to these dreadful vaults—I can there convince you I am right. Oh! my dear aunt, forgive all this presumption; but I feel, as if years had passed over me, during the last few dreadful hours.”

“ You know not the comfort, Juliet, that your voice gives me—last night—the difference is greater than you can tell—let us go then, dearest, but by the public staircase; workmen are already here, and we must avoid them.”

At this moment, the door of the room was opened by sister Johanna, who came to announce that the Abbot of St. Andrea was arrived, and had desired to see the Abbess in the public parlour.

“Must you go alone?” said Juliet, anxiously.

“Yes, Juliet; but fear not for me, in this interview; I am prepared for it:—wait for me here. Go, my daughter,” continued the Abbess, addressing the pale and horror-struck Johanna, “go to the Abbot, and tell him I will wait upon him.”

The nun retired, and the Abbess, seizing a pen, wrote the word HOPE upon a scrap of paper, and put it in her bosom.

“I will make him lead me to her, Juliet, and if I can leave this word with her, it may sustain her life:—be here when I return.”

When Geraldine entered the room where Isidore was sitting, he remained for a moment without rising to receive her, as if to enjoy the triumph of seeing her at last subdued before him; but the moment was not yet arrived.

With an aspect as lofty and a brow as placid as ever, the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's bowed in ceremonious salutation, and took her seat. He strove to read, in her dark clear eye, the feelings that he knew were wringing her heart; but he found nothing of it. It was Geraldine who broke the silence.

"Has your lordship received my summons?" she said, in a voice that expressed more authority than fear.

"I have, holy mother; and shall not fail to obey it; but as I found it, in my judgment, necessary that the custody of the abandoned wretch, whose shame has been made manifest to your eyes, should be intrusted to firmer hearts than might be found among your sisterhood, I have, as you doubtless know, placed mutes of the holy office to guard her cell, and I am here to see that they have done their duty—and to relieve their watch by others."

The Abbess bowed.

"Does the arrangement meet your approbation, holy mother?"

“Your lordship cannot doubt it.”

“Is it your purpose, holy mother, that the council shall meet in the marble chapter-room?”

“Assuredly. The time, though short, will, as I think, be sufficient for its preparation.”

“Zeal and good-will in a righteous cause,” replied the Abbot with a gentle smile, “will multiply the means allowed us to advance it.”

“Will you not see the prisoner, my lord?”

“Yes, holy mother: such is my purpose.”

“Then I will attend your lordship.”

“Nay, such ceremony is not needful, and I would spare you the sight of such a wretch.”

“It will indeed be painful, but it is my duty, and I will not shrink from it. My office commands me to see her in her cell, to know that she has all that is necessary to sustain life, and no more.”

The vexed Abbot again knew that she was right, and dared not contradict her.

Geraldine led the way, but on reaching the door stepped back, as only the same authority, which had placed the grim sentinels before it,

could sanction their permitting any one to enter. Food for the unfortunate Camilla had been delivered to these men, and by them placed within the door of her cell.

They now retired for a few paces, and the Abbot having taken the key from one of them, opened the door, and let the Abbess pass in.

Camilla was lying upon the bed, with her eyes closed, but on Geraldine's pronouncing her name, she opened them. The expression of that look was terrible—but it lasted only a moment, for she saw the Abbot, and again closed her eyes.

The Abbess went to her bedside, and again spoke to her; but her voice, which had been so firm when addressing the iron-hearted bigot who was watching for her own destruction, was now quite inarticulate. Isidore remarked the weakness, and hailed the first symptom of his triumph.

“Holy mother,” said he, “you seem not to be capable of addressing this wretch, as it is our bounden duty to address her. Woman! remember

your sins ! your hours are numbered. Retire, holy mother," he continued, in a tone of contempt, "if this be indeed a necessary duty, I grieve to see that you are so little capable of performing it."

"Have your wants been supplied, Camilla?" said the Abbess, without noticing his mandate.

Again the unfortunate woman opened her eyes for a moment, and fixed them upon Geraldine, but closed them again without speaking.

"Why are you so thinly covered, daughter?" said the Abbess, drawing over her some of the linen of the bed ; "in decency, you should conceal your person from your guards, who must enter with your food."

Geraldine now turned to retire. Her errand was done. As she placed the sheet over Camilla, the ready paper was left in the bed, and so close to her person, as to have made her feel its touch.

Isidore followed the Abbess out of the cell, persuaded that she had performed this painful piece of ceremonious observance, solely to sustain

her reputation for the punctilious attention to all her duties, for which she had so long been celebrated.

Immediately after this visit, he took his leave, and Geraldine was once more left alone with her niece.

“Did you succeed in giving it to her?” inquired Juliet eagerly.

“Perfectly. If greater matters could be managed as well, Juliet, I might yet live to scorn the cruel malice of this Isidore. Now, then, I will attend you to the vaults, though, I confess, I see not, to what purpose.”

“You will not say so, when I explain myself; besides, I shall understand your description better when we are there.”

A few minutes brought them to the door, leading to the dungeons: Juliet had brought a light, and they renewed the examination together.

The attention of both was directed to the examination of the masonry which terminated the vaults; this appeared exactly the same in all of them. Juliet stood for many minutes, the

lamp held high above her head, and her eyes fixed earnestly upon the wall, silently meditating the possibility of her plan; at length she said—

“ I am sure that it may be done—but oh ! for God’s sake, risk not the dear chance, by bringing in a stranger to help us.”

“ But where is the arm that can do this labour for us, Juliet ?”

“ I do believe,” replied the poor girl fervently, “ that our own strength can do it.”

Geraldine shook her head, as she replied :—

“ And should we fail ? Think of her fearful agonies ! Think of the few short hours we should have for such a labour. Oh, Juliet, what would this slight arm of yours avail against such a bulwark as this ?”

“ Then Heaven send us a stranger !” said Juliet, as she turned despondingly to leave the vault. “ If such be your decision, let us lose no time. I heard the workmen in the chapter-room : it is among them only that we can seek assistance.”

The Abbess did not reply, but silently led the way across the chapel. On again reaching her parlour, she closed the door, and said, with the solemn tone of final resolution—

“So then let it be, Juliet;” and then added, “it is all that is left us; they may betray me, but I know the worst of that.”

“Not you:—they never shall have the power of betraying you,” said Juliet, with the air of a person resolutely determined: “It is I who must make the attempt, and I will do it instantly.”

“And think you I will insure my safety at the risk of yours? Fie, fie; you do not mean it.”

“Indeed, I do not,” replied Juliet; “I too well know it is impossible, but I am not an abbess—I am not even a nun. What dreadful danger would threaten me, if it were known that I had been seen prying about to watch these workmen? My curiosity might be punished by Marcella, by the infliction of a dozen Pater-nosters. You yield, my beloved aunt! you

yield to truth and reason. Give me the gold with which I must tempt our assistant. I will go boldly to the chapter-room, and study the countenances I may find there, and may God give me power to read them !”

“ So far will I use your agency, my dearest Juliet, as to permit your entering the chamber in the manner proposed; I know no danger can be incurred by that. Speak to the men about their hateful labour; their voice and manner will tell much—then bring me your report. I will give you no gold, my Julie t; it is I who must settle that part of the business. You may, I think, with little danger, do what you propose; and should you find it possible to lead one of them apart, where I could meet you, you will have done much.”

“ That is all I ask,” replied Juliet, “ and you will thus avoid the wanton and useless danger of conversing with a man, whom, perhaps, after all you may never employ.”

There was so much truth in this, that the Abbess immediately acknowledged it with an

affectionate embrace, and Juliet left her in all the nervous trepidation of hope and fear. She took her way to the chapter-room, through the passages least used by the community, but there was less chance of meeting any of them than she was aware. Terror immeasurable, undefinable, and overwhelming, had seized upon them, from the moment they had learnt that familiars of the Inquisition were stationed within the convent walls.

Not a sound was to be heard through the long corridors; the garden was utterly forsaken, and the frightened women hid themselves in little knots of three or four together, in the cells most distant from the dreaded spot where these agents of mysterious power were placed.

On approaching the chapter-room, the sound of so many voices reached her, that she decided upon loitering about the passages, in the hope that, while they were coming or going, she might be able to address herself to some individual without bringing upon her the attention of others at the same time.

While creeping about with this hope, she distinguished a man's voice chanting in a low sweet tone a well-known canticle. The sound was at no great distance, and she soon found that it issued from the lumber-room beside the chapel. She went in, and saw a young man, apparently not more than twenty years of age, engaged in looking over many large rolls of tapestry, to find what was most fitting for the work he was upon.

Juliet's heart beat quick.—How should she begin? Nothing could be more favourable than the circumstances of the encounter; the man was alone, employed at a considerable distance from any companion, and, better still, his youth and good-humoured countenance gave much greater encouragement than she had dared to hope for. But how should she begin?

The young man seemed startled at seeing her, and, perhaps, felt no inconsiderable degree of awe at her religious habit; he immediately took up one of the rolls which lay before him, as if hastened in his decision by her coming, and

prepared to depart. All the premeditated plans she had formed for beginning a conversation, were forgotten in the alarm of that moment, and shutting the door by which she had entered, she put her back against it, and stretching out her hands towards him, exclaimed—

“Christian ! for the love of God, hear me !”

“What is the matter, dear young lady ?” said the man, half frightened, but much affected by the look and manner of the beautiful girl who addressed him. “Is there any thing I can do to serve you ?”

“Oh yes, yes,” said Juliet, her hope strengthened almost to extacy by the kindness of his tone. “Have you a sister ? Have you a wife ? Is there any one you love ?—For her sake help me, and the God of mercy will bless you.”

“Holy Jesus !” exclaimed the young man, a dreadful idea occurring to him. “Is it you, so young and so beautiful, that are going—to be buried yonder ?”

He spoke the last words in a whisper, and turned pale as he uttered them.

“It is one as dear to me as myself,” replied Juliet, approaching him, “and I shall die with her.”

“Not if I can save you, young lady. Tell me how it can be done, without my getting burnt at the stake for it, and I will do it.”

“Wealth shall be yours, beyond what you ever dreamed of,” cried the happy Juliet, “and the danger is none. Now hear me; and if you would save my young life, forget not a word I say.”

She then explained to him the dreadful ceremony that was to take place on the morrow. The poor fellow trembled as he listened to her, yet it was evident, that he listened with that sure attention which renders forgetfulness impossible.

“When your day’s work is done, it is here, good friend, that you must lodge yourself,” and Juliet, as she spoke, opened the door leading to the belfry. “I will bring you food—to-morrow, between the hours of eleven and two, the work of death is to be done. When they have

built up the wall upon their victim, they will leave her, and within an hour, the convent will be as still, as if nothing but God's service had been done here. Still we must wait—wait till darkness help us; then I will come to you, and with this pick-axe, which is here to dig our graves, shall you, good friend, un-make one. I have a key that can open every gate for you, and for the being you will save; and you shall carry gold enough to take you to any land you will, if you should fear discovery hereafter of what you are about to do.”

“Indeed it will be needful, holy lady; I may not dare to remain here after such a deed.”

“Nor shall you. Wait but an instant, if you doubt my word, and I will bring you earnest of the gold I promise.”

“I do not doubt you. If I did, lady, it should not be for you that I would hazard life, as truly I must do. But comfort your kind heart—I will stand by you—and I see not but the thing may go through well, and safely. Your gold shall make a happy wife of one as young,

as gentle, and almost as handsome as yourself. But hark ! that is Ricardo calling me—I shall be sure to find some way of hiding here : and do not risk the coming to me to-night ; I can manage for my supper without that.”

So saying, the youth shouldered the tapestry, and obeyed the call of his comrade ; leaving Juliet in a state of happiness, to which it would be difficult to do justice by any description.

On entering the room where her aunt was waiting for her, in sickening doubt and dread, rather than with hope, Juliet’s first impulse was to throw herself on her knees, and exclaim, “ Thank God with me—she is saved !”

A burst of tears, so violent as almost to terrify the Abbess, followed, but they brought most needful relief to her over-strained feelings.

In a short time she recovered strength and composure, and then communicated every thing that had passed between herself and her new friend.

When Juliet had finished her narrative, and received the grateful praises of Geraldine for

her firmness, she addressed her aunt with the most affecting earnestness, entreating her not in any way to take part in the escape of Camilla. Her arguments were so well-founded, and her anxiety, that they should be complied with, so deeply sincere, that Geraldine thought she had a right to be indulged.

“I do yield to you, my love,” she said at length; “having listened patiently to all your arguments, I will allow that they are too powerful to be rejected. It would be cruel, for the sake of vain bravado, to repay all you have done by endangering myself; I know, that to think you have saved me too, will be no small reward.”

“This trust—this confidence—how can I thank you enough?” said the delighted girl.—“Think not I presume too much upon such kindness, if I say, that to make it quite effectual, you must immediately mix with your poor frightened nuns, and, above all things, at the hour of Camilla’s escape, you must have many with you—who may bear witness, should evi-

dence be wanting, where and how you were engaged."

"My guide and counsellor! You shall be obeyed, Juliet," said Geraldine; "but let me, in my turn, have some influence. The hour of dinner has passed—I know not how—or when—every thing is out of rule—it is quite impossible it should be otherwise; therefore, your being absent from chapel and from supper will not be remarked. Go to your cell; I will send you such refreshment as I know you need; endeavour to calm your mind; and remember how much depends on your succeeding. May this night be passed in sleep, dear Juliet!—to-morrow is a dreadful day—end how it may; I will furnish you with money before I sleep. You know where to find the dress Camilla must put on. Now then, my Juliet, we will part; it is not while we are together, that we shall either of us recover from what we have suffered since the morning."

CHAPTER XXVII.

And, with deep charge of secrecy,
She named a place to meet.

SCOTT.

JULIET well knew that, under the present circumstances, there would be no danger of her exciting remarks of any kind, by repairing to her aunt's room before the matin service. She felt very anxious to consult with her once more, previously to the tremendous business of the day; but was determined that, after this interview, they should not again meet in private till the great stake she was about to play for should be lost or won.

She found the Abbess occupied in arranging leases, bills, and letters, in different packets, tying them carefully, and writing labels for each. Surprised at such a moment to find her sufficiently calm for this employment, Juliet exclaimed—

“My dear aunt! is it possible that you can be thus perfectly composed?”

“I am preparing, dearest Juliet,” she replied, “for events which may be likely to follow Camilla’s escape.”

Juliet dared not inquire what these words meant—she dreaded to hear some answer that should indicate doubt of the consequences of what they were about to undertake.

“In short,” continued the Abbess, “I would be ready for whatever may happen. These parchments are the records of all the recent temporal transactions of the convent. I wish, whatever happens to me, to leave proof that I have not misapplied the power which has been vested in me——. Should Camilla perish——. But I must not look that way.”

“Indeed you should not,” replied Juliet cheerfully; “I have not yet studied my fellow-creatures deeply, but the kind voice, the free and fearless eye, the frank, bold, bearing of my young accomplice, rest upon my memory most pleasantly. No, dearest friend; that man will not betray me.”

“I do believe it is impossible—and yet, my child——. But I will not think of that. No, Juliet, no—he could not betray, wantonly betray, to utter and most horrible destruction, such a creature as thou art !”

An expression of such extreme misery appeared on the countenance of Geraldine, as she fixed her eyes on her young counsellor, that Juliet saw she must be herself the greater heroine, and that the firmness necessary for this day’s service must be all her own.

“Fear it not, my beloved aunt,” she replied, fondly embracing her; “but let us turn all our thoughts to our poor prisoner. I am come, during this last hour of leisure, to ask your counsel, as to where she shall shelter herself,

when we have put her forth into the darkness of night?"

"I have thought deeply of it, Juliet, and still adhere to the opinion, that to hang about our gates in the garb of poverty, will be her best concealment, till Jacintha comes. By night, her only shelter can be the porch of some church or palace at Ancona; but she should come to these gates with the first of the mendicants who frequent them in the morning, and remain among the last who linger for the remnants of the supper in the evening; for even if they knew she was gone, it is here they would least expect to find her. A few days will, I doubt not, bring Jacintha here, and then she is safe. This woman has directions to travel with a free display of wealth, as the wife of a rich merchant. In that character, no difficulty can attend her, openly taking passage for any part of the world, where she may wish to join her husband. She may embark her servants and her luggage openly, and when she will; and Camilla, as one of her attendants, may pass securely."

“No,” replied Juliet, “this arrangement cannot be improved. And now farewell, my beloved aunt, I will see you no more alone, till all is over.”

“Juliet!” said the Abbess, in a tone of authority, “I go with you to the vaults to-night.”

“Then will you give as cruel a stab to the heart that best loves you, as ever Isidore gave to yours,” replied Juliet, clasping her hands together with bitter feeling. “Oh, aunt!” she continued, “did you not promise me?”

“Not this, Juliet: surely you did not think I could ever promise you this?—Think what you ask of me. It was I, who pledged my word to Camilla that I would save her—it was I, who vowed, in my secret soul, that I would do it, or perish with her. And would you ask me to leave the whole burden of this solemn vow on you?—You, my poor child—whom I have also sworn to shelter and protect! Think, Juliet, what a perjured wretch you would make me—oh, do not ask it!”

“Were your determination,” answered Juliet gravely, “less vitally important to us all, I would not dare to do it. I would not dare to point out to you, whose word I would for ever make my law, the cruel fallacy of such reasoning. I will ask you one question, and I implore you to let your decision rest upon the answer you shall in conscience give to it. Do you believe, my aunt, that the escape of Camilla will be rendered more easy by your being present at it?”

“Perhaps not, Juliet. But shall I rest in safety, while you ——”

“Hear me—hear me,” cried Juliet vehemently, “and think well, before you let a feeling of idle punctilio destroy us all. I do not think this youth will hold his purpose if you appear. He is hardly so ignorant as not to know, that his danger would be multiplied a hundred-fold.—He will not do it.”

“Juliet!—I am become a child in your hands.—Be it as you will.”

“Now then,” said Juliet, while a glow of

satisfaction flushed her sweet face,—“ now then, be seen by every one—all through the day—all through the night—and when the blessed sun of to-morrow shall rise upon us, you shall see me enter your chamber with its first beams.”

So saying, she gave her aunt one fond, but hasty kiss, and fearing the result of further parley, glided back to her own room.

A few minutes afterwards the bell sounded for chapel, and Juliet joined herself to Marcella's troop. From the chapel she went as usual to the refectory for breakfast, and all with such an air of steady composure, as showed that the progress of life cannot always be measured by weeks or months; but, that events and feelings will sometimes do in a day, the work of many years.

Geraldine, meanwhile, fully aware of the importance of Juliet's parting injunction, complied with it carefully. Scarcely one of the establishment but had been addressed by her, on some pretence or other, before the hour arrived, at which the judges were expected. She inspected

in person the table that was laid for the banquet, and gave orders respecting every circumstance of their reception, and of the dreadful business which was to follow.

The mutes had received instructions from Bartone to remove the person of Camilla from her cell to the sacristy, where she was to await his order to appear before her judges. No circumstance of rigour, which could increase the horror of her situation, was omitted. No woman was permitted to approach her, and the whole community were commanded to shut themselves into their cells at the hour appointed for her removal, that no passing glance of human sympathy might reach her.

Devotional exercises, sufficient to occupy an hour, were appointed to each, and it occurred to Juliet, that, during the period of this strict retirement, she might safely visit her co-adjutor on the staircase of the belfry.

The precise time, at which the removal of Camilla was to take place, had not been mentioned; it was only known, that it would be

done within the hour prescribed for the seclusion of the community, and Juliet determined, that her visit should be made immediately after the bell had sounded, which was to mark its commencement.

She had, indeed, no reason to fear, that any loiterers would cross her path. The first stroke of the bell found every nun within the walls, already on her knees, and had the convent been on fire, it may be doubted if many of them would have dared to quit that position.

Furnished with a bottle of wine and some biscuits, Juliet made her way, unmolested, to the lumber-room. Her master-key gave her ready access to it, and she carefully secured the door behind her, as soon as she had entered. This done, she turned towards the door that opened upon the belfry stairs. It was closed, and she approached to open it. As she drew near to it, she perceived, with feelings which may easily be imagined, that the heavy bolt on the outside was fully pushed into its staple.

That Camilla was lost—that she was herself

betrayed, were the overwhelming thoughts which naturally presented themselves to the terrified girl; yet, even at that fearful moment, she remembered that her aunt was safe from the consequences of her unfortunate attempt; and the consolation this recollection brought with it, restored her composure and resolution in a manner that nothing else could have done. She stood for a moment to consider if there were any possibility of the youth's having concealed himself in the room. It was filled with lumber of various kinds; but she soon ascertained that concealment among it was impossible. With hopeless perseverance in a search which she felt but too certain was in vain, she opened the door which led to the terrace, and just within it, his head snugly supported on the first step, which, by the aid of his arm, made no bad pillow, lay the object of her suspicion in a profound slumber.

Perhaps we never look at a countenance with such confidence that it cannot deceive us, as when the unconscious features are relaxed in sleep. As Juliet looked at the calm expression

of the face before her, she exclaimed involuntarily—"No traitor could sleep thus!"

Her voice awakened him, and he started up with some symptoms of alarm; but a second glance sufficed to re-assure him, and he began to express his thanks for the refreshment she had brought him, which, though not absolutely necessary (for his wallet lay beside him), was nevertheless very acceptable. But she cautioned him not to speak. The sacristy, it is true, was at the farther extremity of the chapel; yet even at that moment it was not impossible that the officials might be leading their prisoner through the passage which led to the chamber they were in.

Still Juliet most anxiously desired to converse with him, and after a moment's consideration she led him nearly to the top of the staircase, and having secured the door at the bottom of it, ventured to address him. She now stated to him explicitly the amount of the sum he should receive, the moment Camilla was outside the convent gate. In reply, he told her frankly, that it greatly exceeded his expectations, but

that her generosity would bind him to help her friend to the very utmost of his power.

Juliet took advantage of this assurance so far as to confess, that if he could furnish a shelter for her during the night or two that must pass before she could leave Ancona, it would be most essentially increasing the obligation they should owe him.

“Nothing more easy, Signora, than that,” replied the man cordially; “my mother lives by letting lodgings, and though it is but a poor place, I doubt if we could find a safer.”

“Thank Heaven!” exclaimed Juliet, inexpressibly relieved; “you know not the comfort you have given me.”

“It is a comfort to hear you say so, Signora; but I hope ——” and, for the first time, his countenance had an expression of fear upon it,—“I hope, Signora, that she will not wear the dress of a nun?”

Juliet explained to him the preparation she had made to avoid this; and they then entered into a discussion of the plan (which as well as

every other part of the scheme, Juliet spoke of as her own,) by which it was proposed that Camilla should receive her daily food by mixing with the crowd of beggars who constantly received supplies at the gate of the convent. To this he strongly objected; reasonably remarking, that though her disguise might conceal her from most of the sisters who took it in turn to attend at the gate, yet it was possible that some eye might be struck with a resemblance to a person who must, as he truly said, be much in their thoughts. Juliet felt the truth of all this; but observed that it could only be avoided by his coming himself among the crowd to receive from her the intelligence of Jacintha's arrival.

“That will never do, Signora; I am known as well as St. Michael's Tower throughout Ancona; and nobody will see Pedro Rolli going a begging, without thinking that something queer is the reason of it. No; that will never do.”

“Then how can I convey the intelligence to her?”

“Would there be any danger, if the gentle-

woman you expect were to pay a visit at the convent?"

"Certainly not;—she must do so to announce her own arrival."

"Then, do you think, Signora, that you can remember these words, 'Maria Rolli, Street of the Resurrection, No. 52?' The weeks of the year. Signora, and the blessed resurrection, you know; do you think you can remember it?"

"Fear me not," replied Juliet,—"I am hardly likely to forget it; Jacintha, then, shall seek her there?"

"And shall be sure to find her, Signora; but if I may presume so much, I would say that after seeing this dame Jacintha, and teaching her how to find us, you would do well to have nothing further to do with either of them, till they are out of danger—nor then either, Signora, unless you are out of danger too."

"You are very right, Pedro," replied Juliet; "fear not that I will risk the safety of any of you—and now I will leave you. I must have been here an hour, and I can return securely:

to-night then, about two hours before midnight, I shall seek you here—farewell.”

The voice of Juliet trembled, which Pedro perceiving, answered cheerily—

“Fear nothing, Signora, we will get through the business, though ’tis a strange one, and I will marry my pretty Laura before I am a week older. Farewell, Signora !”

Juliet thought it safest to traverse the terrace, and re-enter by the door which led to the great staircase. She would have given much to communicate the result of her interview with Pedro to her aunt, but she dared not seek her. The time was fast approaching when the arrival of the three judges might be expected; and she was most thankful when she again reached her cell, so large a portion of her anxiety removed, and without having encountered any alarm on her way.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Respectons ses décrets en silence, et faisons notre devoir.

J. J. ROUSSEAU.

ISIDORE was the first of the expected guests who arrived. He was attended by six persons in the dress of ecclesiastics. Four of these the Abbess knew as officiating priests of St. Andrea's, and they were doubtless come to perform the mass that was to precede the trial, and the other religious ceremonies which were to follow it; but the other two were strangers—and something seemed to whisper to her heart, as she looked at them, that they were the executioners.

The Abbess of St. Ildefonse followed him, and almost at the same moment the aged Abbot of St. Sebastiano also arrived.

Geraldine was seated in the public parlour of the convent to receive them, with all the state and ceremony belonging to her rank. A few sentences, ~~stiffly~~ formal, and in which no allusion was made to the solemn business that had called them together, were followed by an invitation to adjourn to the refectory, where the banquet was prepared.

Isidore's eyes incessantly followed the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's—he watched every look and every movement—he listened with breathless attention to every word she uttered, but it was in vain he sought to witness the feeling he had perilled his soul to create. She evinced not the slightest emotion of any kind. Her demeanour was uniformly dignified and calm; she did the honours of her splendid board with the punctilious observance of pride and high station, nor could any human eye have traced upon that noble brow one shadow of the dark terrors which tortured the brain beneath it. It was not before Bartone she could be seen to tremble; had she suffered the most torturing death

in his presence, she would not have gratified him by a single sigh.

From the table they passed into the chapel, where the whole community were already assembled, and where mass was performed; while the unhappy Camilla, still guarded by her hateful mutes, was stationed standing in the middle of the aisle, through the whole ceremony.

At the conclusion of it, instead of the *Gloria in excelsis*, the female choir sang the plaintive *Miserere mei*; but many a sweet voice faltered, and some few, in whom terror had not dried up the source of pity, were rendered inaudible by tears.

The service being ended, the four superiors continued in their stalls, till the whole community had retired. The Abbess of Sant' Catharina's then rose from her seat, and led the way to the marble chapter-room; the Abbess of St. Ildefonse went next; and the two Abbots, walking side by side, followed.

A rudely carved bench of black marble had been covered with tapestry for their accommodation, and on this they seated themselves. Before

them stood a table, on which was laid the general rule of the Dominican order, impressed with its seal, emblematic of the founder's birth, a dog bearing in his mouth a flaming torch. And near it lay the especial rule of the convent of Sant^a Catherina of Siena, with its sacred symbol of two bleeding hearts. There were also, a pen and iron inkstand, and a small roll of blank parchment, before which was seated on a low stool, with his face towards the judges, one of the ecclesiastics who had accompanied Isidore.

When they were all seated, the Abbot of St. Andrea's commanded the two strangers, who were the only persons of his train, except his secretary, that remained near him, to call in the prisoner. She was left to await this summons in the aisle of the chapel, and appeared almost immediately, between the mutes.

Whether it were, that the nature of Camilla was of that elastic character which rises higher from oppression, or that the word which bade her still preserve the precious balm, bestowed by Heaven to sustain us all, upheld her spirit, we

know not, but she came into the presence of her judges with no external marks of fear or weakness.

As soon as she had taken the place indicated to her by Isidore, which was in front of her judges, and immediately behind the secretary, Geraldine arose, and from a parchment she held in her hand, read the announcement of the cause for which they were assembled.

The accusation was then read by the secretary, and when it was concluded, Camilla stepped forward from between the mutes who were still stationed beside her, and addressed the court.

Her first words were pronounced so feebly as to be scarcely audible—she stopped short, but after a moment began again with greater strength.

“Let not my weakness,” said she, addressing herself particularly to the two Abbesses—“Let not my natural weakness plead against me. In my condition, an innocent woman may well tremble. And yet, most holy mothers, and

you, most reverend fathers of the church, I ought to stand fearless before your justice.

“The crime of which I stand accused, is one my soul abhors. The breach of any vow is heinous sin—but to break that most solemn one which seals a union with Christ, merits all the severity the church can show.—I NEVER TOOK THAT VOW.—So help me Heaven, in my hour of need! I am the lawful wife of Count Cesario di Mondello. This is my defence—and on the truth of it, I stake my soul’s salvation.”

She said no more, and the silence of a moment followed. The Abbess of St. Ildefonse then spoke in a low voice to Isidore, who sat next to her. The Abbot of St. Sebastiano bent forward his grey head towards his fellow judges, and a whispered conversation followed among them.

“Her plea,” said the venerable Abbess of St. Ildefonse, suddenly raising her voice, “must be most deliberately and cautiously investigated, my lord, Abbot, before we can reject it:—not for the few days that remain for me on earth—could they be passed in glory, exceeding all that

this world ever saw, would I doom her, while a shadow of hope remained that her statement might be true."

"Hear her words, holy fathers!" exclaimed Geraldine. "If ye be men, pause long, ere ye condemn."

Isidore did not answer, but took from his bosom a document, which he handed across the table to the secretary, saying,—“read that aloud.”

The monk obeyed. It was a formal attestation of Camilla's profession in the convent of St. Urbano at Rome, signed by the superior of the convent, and four ecclesiastics of high rank in the church.

A deep and frightful silence followed the reading of this parchment.

“Your judgment,”—said Isidore in a tone of high authority.

Still they were silent.

“Is then the word of this degraded wretch to be placed against the testimony of some of the holiest of men?”

No voice answered the challenge.

“How is this,” exclaimed Isidore, with vehemence. “Virgin mother of God! is it beneath a roof reared for the honour of that pure spouse thou gavest to thy Son—is it here, that a horror so atrocious shall escape unpunished? Speak, holy father!—Holy mothers, speak! What is your sentence?”

“My lord——there may be doubt——” said the gentle Abbess of St. Ildefonse.

“Take care, holy mother!——Be mindful of what you say—I give you warning. It is not these marble walls can shut in words of blasphemy. Wherefore was that holy office instituted, which guards our blessed faith with such dear care? Can it not dive into the very heart, and see the impious thought ere it be born in words? Think you this office sleeps? I WILL AWAKE IT! Ay—with a trump that shall echo from the inmost recesses of its sacred walls, even to the Vatican.”

The aged woman, to whom he addressed these appalling words, shrank into silence, and groans

burst from more than one breast in that dark conclave.

It was again the deep-toned voice of Bartone that spoke.

“Does then this solemn attestation go for nothing?—Is such your pleasure? If it be—speak, and it shall be recorded.”

“Let me see the signatures,” said the Abbot of St. Sebastiano. “There is one among them I should know among a thousand—Vancilli was the friend of my youth.”

Isidore handed the scroll to him. The old man shook his head as he examined it, and gave it back without saying a word.

“Am I believed at last, holy brother?” said Isidore with a sneer.

“Not your word, holy brother,—not your word could I doubt,” replied the Abbot of St. Sebastiano, “but I would gladly doubt my eyesight, if thereby I could spare this young life.”

“This is trifling, holy brother—and on a subject which it ill becomes one in your station to

deem trivial. Remember at what risk you falsify your vow, and speak according to the evidence. —Guilty—or not guilty?”

“Guilty!”

“Guilty!”

Was faintly whispered by two palsied voices.

“Guilty!” cried Bartone, in his still deep base voice.

Geraldine spoke not—but it was not needed.

“Record the sentence,” said the Abbot of St. Andrea’s, in a voice of ill-suppressed triumph.

“The court is broken up.”

The judges rose, and one by one left the chamber. Isidore was the last, and lingered on the threshold to give a parting order to the guards. He then stepped forward to the side of Geraldine, and said, “One hour is allowed to prepare the prisoner. All the community must be present, holy mother, at the ceremony of degradation, and at the service that will follow it; when this is ended, let them repair each to their separate cell, saying aloud the psalms of penitence, till the bell tolls for the departed. Such is the law.”

Geraldine bowed, and passed on. The four superiors retired to the convent parlour. The four officiating priests followed; but the other two ecclesiastics remained, to arrange the ceremonials of the tragedy which was to succeed.

A trembling nun, who looked pale as a spectre, handed round wine and cakes. Not a word was spoken—not a look was exchanged.—Each drained the cup of wine which was brought them, as if they hoped to sustain thereby the life they felt failing within them.

Isidore alone appeared to retain the firmness necessary to carry through the work of horror, which all had consented to witness. He did not, however, attempt to disturb the stillness that had settled upon them. It is probable that he felt no wish to learn what was passing at their hearts.

The hour wore heavily away, yet all started when the bell of the chapel told them that it was gone.

The courage of Geraldine now threatened to fail her. She attempted to rise, but feared to do so, lest she should betray the weakness so

rapidly stealing upon her. Isidore marked the livid paleness of her cheek, he saw the drops of agony that started on her brow; and hoping she might be about to utter some desperate protest to stop the proceedings, which would at once place her within the danger of that fearful power it was his especial object to raise against her, he suddenly rose, and said,—

“It is time this duty were performed. Why do we thus delay to cleanse the church of Christ of this foul blot?”

The reluctant conclave, startled by this threatening summons, rose together, and Geraldine amongst the rest; but mist and vapours swam before her eyes, her knees sank under her, her heart ceased to beat, and, unsustained by any friendly arm, she fell prostrate on the floor.

This was not what Isidore wished. Were she really dead, there might indeed be some pleasure in knowing that she fell at last, and perished beneath the power she had so often braved. But that she should swoon at such a moment, grieved him; for though it showed how futile was her

boasted strength of mind, it must put her beyond the reach of the pang he had prepared for her.

The good Abbess of St. Ildefonse, tenderly sympathising with feelings so like her own, kneeled down beside Geraldine, and begging one of the attendant ecclesiastics to seek for water, endeavoured to afford her relief, by raising her head and chafing her hands.

“Our business is too important, holy mother,” said Isidore, “to permit your performing the office of nurse to our beloved sister, however dearly we regard her health.” Then turning to one of the priests, he said, “Seek in the offices, brother Basil, for some female, who may do what is needful for her.—Abbess of St. Ildefonse,” he continued, sternly, “your pity for a feeble sister must not impede your duty to your God. Leave her, holy mother;—walk forward—I will see that she be properly attended.”

“My lord,” replied the venerable recluse, “our sister feels the horror of this hour as a woman. I pretend not to more strength. Go on, holy fathers, and meet as you may the

ghastly spectacle that awaits you. I will remain beside this honoured lady, and succour her with my best care ; it is a work more fitting to my sex and calling, than the attending your dread sacrifice."

"Be it as you will, holy mother," replied Bartone ; "yet remember there are more eyes than mine that watch the performance of your duty."

"My lord," interrupted the Abbess of St. Ildefonse, with spirit, "I remember my fifty years of faithful service before God's altar, and I fear not that his vicegerents on earth should find it a sin, that, while living as a saint, I have preserved the heart of a woman."

Isidore was silent. He knew how strict was the life this holy woman had led ; he knew, too, that her brother was one of the holy college into which it was his dearest hope to enter.

The two Abbots now moved on together, preceded by the priests, leaving Geraldine still insensible, and the Abbess of St. Ildefonse tenderly exerting all her skill to restore her.

As soon as the Abbots had reached their respective stalls, and the priests their stations at the altar, Camilla was led to the front of it by the men who had been employed to prepare her for the ceremony of degradation.

A stool was placed at the distance of a few yards from the lowest step of the altar, and on this the unhappy Camilla was seated, in the full dress of her order, and with her veil thrown completely over her. The rule she was said to have transgressed was written on parchment, and held up before her by an aged sister of the convent.

The community lined the two sides of the nave, leaving a wide space between them, in the middle of which was a bier, with a black pall thrown across it.

As soon as Camilla was seated, the two lines chanted in low and dismal cadence the alternate verses of the *Miserere*, pausing long between each verse. During these pauses, the stranger monks took off the veil, hood, and robe of Camilla, leaving her unclothed, save by a long

tunic of white cloth, which reached from the throat to the feet. Her religious habit was torn asunder into many fragments, and scattered on the floor.

The sentence recorded against her was then read aloud in Latin, and three times repeated. She was now commanded to rise, and the procession began. It was preceded by a priest, who carried a large cross reversed. The sisterhood followed, two and two, each bearing in her hand an extinguished torch. Then came the pale Camilla, in her white shroud-like garment, supported on each side by a sable mute. Next followed two priests, one carrying incense, the other holy water; and last, the two mitred Abbots closed the line.

The march was slow and solemn. Each nun, her head sunk in her bosom, and her veil closely drawn round her, recited in a low whisper the prayers for the dying.

In this order they passed down the side aisle, and up to the centre of the nave where stood the bier. The nuns again divided into two lines,

taking their station as before. Camilla, pale, motionless, and seemingly unconscious of what was passing, was raised without a struggle in the arms of the mutes, and placed upon the bier, where she lay perfectly still and unresisting while the assistant priests spread the funeral pall over her.

This ceremony completed, the solemn service for the dead was heard from the altar ; and when this ended, the thrilling words, “ *Requiem æternam dona ei, Domine !*” burst forth in full chorus from the nuns.

When the Requiem ceased, a silence like that of the grave ensued, and lasted till time sufficient had been allowed for each to breathe an inward prayer.

Then a signal was given to the nuns, who immediately retired with slow and noiseless steps, not one of them daring to throw a farewell glance to the poor wretch, who, warm in life and youth, was now to be interred within her horrid tomb. All the assistants followed, except the mutes, the stranger priests, whose

unpitying services were still required, and the two judges, who were bound to see the final execution of their sentence.

As soon as the doors of the chapel were closed, Isidore gave a signal to the men. The bier was lifted on their shoulders, and borne through the iron door into the vaults.

It was, as Geraldine had supposed, within the massive depth of the wall which guarded the building from the sea, that the living tomb was fabricated, and the dark aperture now yawned before them ; its horrors rendered visible by the pale light of a wax taper that burned within it, near which was placed a pitcher of water, and a small loaf of bread.

The bier was placed on the earth—the pall was removed ; but the assistants started back as they withdrew it, exclaiming—

“ She is already dead !”

“ Then bury her,” said Isidore, with horrid calmness.

Camilla was again raised in the arms of her executioners, who bore her forward to the dark

recess; the cool air revived her strength, and the friendly faintness forsook her; she opened her eyes upon the scene, and all its terrors seized her heart at once. For a moment she looked wildly on them all, and then uttered a shriek, which left its sound within the ears that heard it as long as life remained. Yet it did but hasten the deed. Startled, but not softened, by that dismal cry, the men threw her from their arms, and instantly began the frightful work that was to shut out the air of life for ever.

The wretched woman sprang upon her feet—the stones were rolled against her—she raised her helpless arms, and madly strove to impede the savage work—in vain. A few short moments hid her from their sight, and a few more restored the treacherous wall to the same look of harmlessness as its neighbours.

The men whose hearts had stood this deed, still had strength left to creep like loathsome reptiles from the vaults. Isidore closed and locked the door—and if any feeling like regret smote his heart, it was that Geraldine

d'Albano was not at his side to see what he had seen.

The Abbot of St. Sebastiano had not entered with them. The old man was on his knees beside the door ; and if prayers and tears could absolve him from his share of that dark deed, he was not to be accounted guilty.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Courage mounteth with occasion.

SHAKSPEARE.

ALL who had come to Sant' Catherina's to assist at the trial and execution of Camilla, left it as soon as their tremendous business was completed, except the Abbess of St. Ildefonse. Geraldine continued so alarmingly ill, that the good lady, who had great faith in her own powers as a leech, would not leave her, but dispatching her attendants to her convent, that the community might not be alarmed at her prolonged absence, she prepared to pass the night with her friend.

The state of Geraldine, though not threaten-

ing danger to her life, was yet such as to require great attention. For many hours, faintings continued to succeed each other, with little intermission, and when at length they ceased, she was so reduced as to render her voice scarcely audible.

Her faculties, her nerves, and her strength had, indeed, been too severely tried; and had not her bodily powers yielded before the last awful scene, it is highly probable that her mind might have been for ever unsettled by the intensity of her sufferings.

The melancholy nuns met in the refectory at the hour of supper. Even Isidore had directed the omission of the vesper service. The close neighbourhood of their lost, but still living companion, even he, thought might prove too terrible.

Dreadful as were the circumstances in which they last met, and heavily as the remembrance pressed upon them all, they yet were conscious of relief from the departure of the hated officials; and by degrees the silence which had so

long chained their lips, relaxed. Again knots of whisperers drew together, and the healing effects of companionship and sympathy were felt by all.

Yet there was one among them who, though she rather sought than shunned the notice of those around her, would have given worlds, had she possessed them, to be freed from them,—from the lingering hours that seemed to stand still, in mockery of her impatience,—and from the slowly-sinking light of day.

The flushed cheek, and feverish eye of Juliet, attracted the attention of Marcella.

“This day has been too much for you, my poor dear,” said she, addressing her kindly, “we shall have you ill too, as well as our holy mother, if we do not take care. I will boil some herbs for you, my dear; and, if I am not too much worn out, after this awful day, I will pass the night in your cell, to see that you want for nothing.”

“Oh, my dear kind mother,” exclaimed Juliet, with a portion of her newly-learned self-

command, "it is you who want care; how very ill you look! I would offer to watch by you, but, in truth, I am already so weary that I long to go to rest: this has been a heavy day, and I would it were over."

"*A* heavy day! a heavy day, indeed!" exclaimed Marcella, "and a heavy night, too, will it be to one who was amongst us three short days ago!—But do I look so very ill, my dear? Surely I do feel very poorly——"

"Indeed, dear mother," replied Juliet, "you must be mindful of your health. What would your poor novices do, if you were sick?"

"Very true, my dear. Who can say what would become of them?—and the holy mother sick too! The will of God be done! But truly we are visited by afflictions!"

At length the clock struck nine; it was the hour for retiring to rest, and the rule of Sant' Catherina enforced strict conformity to this hour, throughout the whole community. Even in case of sickness, the arrangements for watch-

ing were to be completed before it struck, so that no excuse might be left for any nun or novice whom the Abbess (she alone being exempted from the rule) should find lingering in the galleries. Juliet knew all this, and she knew also, that even should her cautious step be heard, it would this night create far more fear than curiosity.

This conviction robbed her enterprise of half its terrors; and yet enough were left to curdle the young blood of Juliet. Twice she applied her hand to the fastening of her door, and that trembling hand failed to obey her will. She kneeled down and fervently implored of Heaven to grant her power to act.

It is no miracle that sends an instant answer to such prayers as these. To feel that the purpose which unstrings our nerves, and sends our blood back freezing to the heart, is still such as we can ask the God of truth to aid, will give firmness to the weakest hand. Juliet felt that it was so, as she lifted her heart to Heaven; and

when she rose from her knees, she sat down for a short moment, as if to give time for this healing balm to do its work within her.

It was with a consciousness of inward strength which gave her undoubting confidence in herself, that she now left her cell.

Noiseless as the movement of the bat's velvet wing, was the step of Juliet, as she passed the doors of her companions. "They cannot sleep," thought she:—"Surely no eye can sleep within these walls to-night—poor souls! I pity them—they have not my hope—."

Her lamp in one hand, her all-powerful key in the other, Juliet stood before the door of the lumber-room. Why did she pause before she turned the key? Could she still fear treachery in Pedro Rolli? No. Her young heart said it was impossible. Yet the moment that would prove him true was so awfully important, that she trembled at feeling it was come.

She rallied her courage, and entered the room:—all was profoundly still.

"And so it should be," thought Juliet, ad-

vancing towards the staircase he had chosen for repose in the morning.

She set down her lamp where it would be sheltered from the wind, and prepared to open the door; but before she could do so, it was unfastened from within, and the comely person of Pedro Rolli presented itself to her delighted eyes.

Both were almost equally anxious to begin the work of mercy. Pedro instantly shouldered a pick-axe, and put into Juliet's hand a remnant of the wine she had brought him.

"The poor soul will have need of it," said he: "trust you as faithfully as she may, her heart must be cold within her before this."

Juliet sought and found the garments which had been prepared, and another moment brought them to the door of the vaults. The gloomy horrors of their damp darkness seemed, as she opened it, to be changed into noonday brightness, so delightful to her was this near consummation of her eager hopes.

Pedro gave one glance of inquiry at the recent

masonry. "It looks strong enough to keep in a poor weak girl," said he; "but it will hardly keep me and my pick-axe out."

"Camilla! dear Camilla!" cried Juliet aloud.
"Can you hear me, my Camilla?"

Pedro was too much in earnest with his work to pause in it, even to give the impatient Juliet an opportunity of listening for an answer. His task was no light one. Superstition, and her strange offspring, Cruelty, seldom leave their work half done.

Juliet watched his lusty strokes with feelings fluctuating between joy at their sure effect, and impatience that they fell not stronger still. Mass after mass gave way, yet still she saw her not; but, from time to time, she continued to repeat her name, that, as soon as a voice could reach her, it might bring assurance of a friend. Pedro paused for an instant to take breath, and Juliet seized the interval to reiterate—"Camilla! dear Camilla! answer me!" But no voice spóke in return.

Again Pedro raised his arm, and with renewed

strength, brought down a huge block, that had resisted many strokes.

As it fell, Juliet espied a faint beam of light; so faint indeed that her straining eye failed to assure her of it fully; then again she lost it wholly, but at length she fancied that it gleamed once more through one small crevice.

“There, Pedro !” she exclaimed in an agony of impatience—“strike your axe there !—I see it, I see it—’tis the light that was buried with her.”

The good Pedro saw it too, and, with eagerness equal to her own, aimed at the opening whence it came ;—another block fell at his feet.

Juliet screamed with extacy—she saw her—and, forgetful that she was arresting the work which she would have given half her life to accelerate, she thrust her arm through the opening to catch hold upon her.

“Camilla ! dear Camilla !” she repeated—and now a voice replied to her, strange, wild, and inarticulate ; but it was evidence of life, and the heart of Juliet bounded at the sound.

Pedro gently put aside her arm, and in another moment forced an opening large enough to permit the head and breast of the poor victim to be visible.

“Can you not take her through at once?” said Juliet.

“I think I might, if she has power herself to help me do it.”

But Camilla was in no state to help him; she was alive, and standing upright, with her face towards them; the expiring taper which glimmered beside her, showed her fearful countenance: her eyes were frightfully distended, and her lips continued to move, giving utterance to no words, but to a shivering cry that made her teeth knock together.

“Pedro, she cannot move!” said the terrified Juliet, “go on, go on, till we can take her in our arms—do you know me, dear Camilla? did she not tell you that you should not perish? now, my Camilla—now.”

Pedro threw his pickaxe aside, and striding over the remnant of the wall he had left before

her, raised her in his arms, and succeeded in bearing her through the opening, and laying her gently on the floor of the vault, on which Juliet sat to support her. The feeling and gentle-hearted young man then brought the wine he had so considerably saved for her, and assisted Juliet in forcing a little of it into the parched mouth of Camilla. To the inexpressible delight of Juliet, and almost equally to the satisfaction of Pedro, she swallowed it—and immediately after heard a deep sigh, which was plainly indicative of a softer and more natural state of feeling: again they put the wine to her lips, of which she took a little without resistance, and then turning her face upon the bosom of Juliet, a shuddering horror ran through all her limbs, and she closed her eyes, whose wild glare had been so painful to behold.

“We must take her out of this dismal place at once, Signora,” said Pedro, preparing to raise her again in his arms; “if she comes quite to herself here, the sight of these cursed vaults will be enough to kill her again.”

“ But the wall, Pedro ?” said Juliet anxiously, “ must it not be built up again, in case the door of the vault should be opened ?”

“ Let them build it up themselves,” answered Pedro, with something very like an oath ; “ it is ~~not~~ I will do it for them.”

“ But the danger of discovery, good Pedro ?”

“ It will never hurt you, Signora, even if you stay amongst their hard hearts, which surely I hope you will not ; but if you do, they will never believe it was you that pulled down that wall—and as for me, I was born in Venice, and never loved any other home—it is there your gold shall carry me, and my pretty Laura too, Signora.”

“ But I must dress this dear friend, Pedro, before you take her hence,” said Juliet ; “ Camilla, dearest—look up at me ; will you not help me to put on the gown I have made for you ?”

Camilla now looked at her stedfastly, and though there was still something painfully bewildered in the expression of her eyes, it

was quite evident she understood her. She attempted to speak, but shook her head, as if unable to do so. Juliet then proceeded to put on the dress she had prepared; Camilla raised herself up, and endeavoured to assist her, but presently ceased to do so, and putting away the hand of Juliet, she again attempted to speak, and with some difficulty articulated, “not this—not this,” endeavouring at the same time to tear from her neck the tunic in which she had been interred. Juliet saw directly how necessary this was, as well for the sake of soothing poor Camilla, by ridding her of this fearful object, as to avoid the evident danger, which would arise from its being seen by others.

“Leave us for a moment, my good Pedro,” said she; “lock that dreadful door, and wait at the entrance of the chapel till I call to you.”

“Do not bid me lock that door, Signora,” replied her thoughtful assistant, retiring as she spoke, “till you have buried within it the shroud, which the poor soul is trying to take off.”

“ Indeed you are right,” replied Juliet, “ this must never see the light.”

Camilla, who was now rapidly recovering her faculties and her strength, was quickly attired, and her appearance satisfied her anxious friend. She thought it would be quite impossible for those who had only seen her in her nun’s habit, to recognise her in this dress.

Juliet, shuddering yet joyful, stepped once more within the gloomy vault, and throwing into it the hateful tunic, retreated, and locked the door.

Pedro was already by the side of Camilla, preparing carefully to support her still faltering steps, when Juliet stopped him, saying—

“ It is here, Pedro, that I must pay you the gold you have so nobly won. God bless you with it; and may you never want at your need, such kindness as you have shown to me.”

Poor Pedro almost wept his gratitude, thanks, and blessings, in return.

“ And now, my dear Camilla, one last word to you; after we leave the chapel, we must speak no more, till we meet again; and that, dear

friend, I trust we shall do. Your Jacintha shall be sent to you at the house of our good Pedro's mother, where you will be lodged till she arrives. With her, I trust, you will reach England in safety. Do you remember the name of my uncle? Be sure not to forget—*Lord Arlborough*—with him you will be safe, till you shall join your husband.”

A person stronger than poor Camilla, might have found it difficult to express to Juliet what she felt at that moment. She threw her feeble arms around her, and shed on her bosom the first tears with which she had been blessed, since the frightful moment of Isidore's discovery.

“ My friend ! my preserver ! ” she murmured, but attempted not to say more ; and Juliet, who felt that she was not yet out of danger, spoke not in return, but led her rapidly, by the aid of Pedro, to the outer gate of the convent ; and there, after folding her once more in her arms, she resigned her to the care of her worthy guide, returning herself, with a step that seemed to tread the air, safely and unchallenged to her cell.

One must have felt anxiety as poignant as that which had been weighing on the heart of Juliet, to conceive fully the happiness she enjoyed at this moment. On the same spot where, two short-hours before, she had besought Heaven for strength to carry her through her fearful enterprise, she now kneeled in happy thankfulness for its success. Could she have seen her aunt, and whispered but one word into her ear, her joy would have been perfect. But this she dared not do. The promised attendance of the Abbess of St. Ildefonse on their superior, had been published throughout the whole establishment, and Juliet could only console herself by the reflection, that the pleasure she so ardently longed for would be hers on the morrow. With this delightful certainty, she laid her weary head upon her pillow, and slept, as only those can sleep, who feel within them that—

“Sweet peace, which goodness bosoms ever.”

CHAPTER XXX.

Not another comfort like to this succeeds in unknown fate.

SHAKSPEARE.

JULIET intended to have risen the next morning an hour earlier than usual; by which time, she thought the duty of an affectionate niece might justify an inquiry at the door of her aunt's room; but, to her utter astonishment, she slept till long after her accustomed hour of rising—she would have been vexed at this, had she not been much too joyful to be vexed at any thing; Dante says, and very truly, that there is—

———nessum maggior dolore

Che recordarsi del tempo felice

Nella miseria.

It is a pity he did not embalm, in words as racy, the equally striking truth, that nothing is so delightful, as the recollection of misery, in the midst of happiness. ~

Juliet's waking was delicious. She had risen from the broken and unrefreshing sleep of the last two nights, to the dreadful consciousness of heavy misery. But now her first feeling was—that danger was past and sorrow over. Even before memory became sufficiently awake to recall the particulars of her last night's successful enterprise, she felt the satisfaction resulting from it. Dressing herself with all possible expedition, she flew to her aunt's apartment, where she knocked, and was bade to enter. She found Geraldine in bed; and the friendly Abbess of St. Ildefonse still sitting near her pillow, with two attendant nuns standing beside her.

Juliet caught the eye of her aunt—and all was told; there needed no word on either side.

Geraldine turned her head away, covering her face with her hand; and Juliet felt that she was

offering a thanksgiving to the God of mercy, for the blessing that look had brought.

Juliet respectfully saluted the kind old lady, who had watched by her aunt, and inquired if she might be permitted to supply her place, while she refreshed herself by taking breakfast.

“ Surely, as her blood relation, this cannot be refused to you, my child,” replied the Abbess of St. Ildefonse; “ though there are many in the community, whose age might entitle them to the preference.”

“ How feel you, holy sister?” she continued, rising, and bending over Geraldine; “ she has been grievously ill during the night, young lady; turning, tossing, muttering prayers, and starting at times as if terrified out of her wits;—no wonder—no wonder; it is easy to guess where her thoughts were wandering.—How are you, holy sister?” she repeated, taking the hand of Geraldine.

“ I am much better, my kind friend,” replied the Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s, turning her

dark eyes, which were swimming in tears, upon her Juliet; "I am so greatly better, that I think I may venture to rise, and take my breakfast with you."

"Dear me! how wonderfully she is revived," said the old lady. "Remember this while you live, sister Agatha," she added, addressing with great earnestness one of the nuns, "that comes from mixing the julap and the cinnamon-water together. I told you, as you know, just after you had said your *Jam lucis orto sidere*, at the hour of prime this morning, that it was the weakness in the stomach, which we must attend to; and there is no medicament in the world for that, equal to cordial julap and cinnamon-water."

"I am very grateful for your kind care of me," said Geraldine, with a smile of irrepressible satisfaction; "and I really feel quite well again."

The Abbess of St. Ildefonse looked a little uneasy, and again took her hand to feel the state of her pulse.

“ I do not think there is any great fever,” said she; “ and yet,” lowering her voice to a whisper, as she addressed sister Agatha, “ I think she seems wandering a little.”

Meanwhile Juliet stood beside the bed, with her eyes fixed upon her aunt, looking what she might not utter, and enjoying, in return, the expression of sweet tranquillity which she had restored to her fine features.

“ Shall I see that breakfast is prepared in your parlour, my dear aunt?” said Juliet.

“ Do so, my child,” replied Geraldine; “ but first attend this holy mother thither; and be careful that she has rose-water to refresh her eyes after her long watch.”

The Abbess of St. Ildefonse and Juliet retired together; and half an hour afterwards the two superiors were taking their breakfast near the pleasant window of that apartment. Two nuns were waiting upon them; and when the meal was over, the Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s begged one of them to fetch her a jug of water, that she might refresh her flowers, which were withering

in the balcony for want of it. When it was brought, she took it, in order to perform the pleasant office herself; but while she was thus engaged, her sister Abbess felt utterly at a loss to conceive how such strong feeling, as she had manifested the day before, could so soon be succeeded by a degree of composure, which permitted her to attend to what seemed so frivolous.

“ Well, well,” said the good lady, addressing the nuns, “ ’tis a comfort to see that she can turn her mind away from it so soon; I wish I loved flowers, or any other thing, well enough to make me forget the horrors of yesterday !”

Soon after breakfast, the Abbess of St. Ildefonse, seeing that her patient was decidedly out of danger, prepared to take her departure; but, before she left the convent, she found an opportunity of saying privately to sister Agatha—

“ Do not forget the julap and cinnamon-water, my daughter; it is possible that towards night your holy mother may show symptoms of

a relapse. If this should happen, fail not to have recourse to this invaluable mixture."

As soon as the Abbess of St. Ildefonse had departed, all the senior nuns of the community requested in succession to wait upon their superior, that they might satisfy their anxiety respecting her health. Not one of the society but had felt a pang for her, amidst their own sorrow; and her severe illness caused a strong emotion among them all. To refuse these demonstrations of true affection, was impossible; but it cost a strong effort to poor Geraldine, to receive with the self-same courteous answers, a score of inquirers, whose presence kept her from hearing what Juliet, who stood with trembling impatience by her side, was dying to tell.

At length they were alone; and the first unrestrained interchange of feeling between them, was by a tender embrace.

"My dear, dear child!" exclaimed Geraldine, sobbing with delightful emotion. "Is it indeed possible, that you have done this thing? Is she, indeed, beyond these fearful walls?"

“Freely—fully—safely clear of them,” answered the happy Juliet.

“And you found her?—Oh, Juliet, how did she bear that dreadful interval? I hardly dare to ask you, how you found her?”

“*And I,*” replied Juliet, “can hardly tell you. Even now, that I once more feel in possession of my sober senses, which sometimes, during the last three days, I have almost doubted; even now, the scene of last night seems to me like a horrid dream. But she is safe—that, at least, is no illusion. I watched her, by the feeble light of the waning moon, leaning on the arm of Pedro; I watched them till they turned the convent wall—and trust me, she looked no more like a nun than he did. Yes, she is safe! The God of heaven be praised for it!”

This assurance was certainly what Juliet best loved to speak, and her aunt to hear; but it was long ere either of them was weary of dwelling upon all the details of the past day and night. Get some dread of further danger to the object

of their care, mixed with the pleasure her escape occasioned them.

Camilla was so entirely unknown at Ancona, that her being discovered was nearly impossible; yet still Geraldine felt painfully anxious about her. It was highly probable, that, in her critical situation, the terror and misery she had endured, might have been productive of alarming results; and the idea that, in such a situation, she should be without the affection and support of a single friend, was dreadful. Juliet, however, was so eloquent in praise of Pedro, and so persuaded that his mother and his Laura must be good and kind, that she greatly alleviated her aunt's fears respecting the short interval that must elapse before the arrival of Jacintha.

It was impossible that the dreadful fate of Camilla should not long be remembered at Sant' Catherina's, with mingled emotions of sorrow and of fear; yet, in this case, as in every other, the petty interests of life's daily history soon blunted the recollection of it; and every thing within the convent seemed restored to its usual

monotonous serenity, when the news was announced, and joyfully passed from mouth to mouth through the community, that lady Juliet d'Albano's little page was returned from Rome.

Morgante brought with him a letter from the dignitary to whom he had been recommended, stating, with many thanks for the kind attention of the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's:—

“ That the boy had completely lost the power of singing, in consequence of a severe indisposition contracted on his journey ; and being fretful and unhappy among the numerous retinue which formed his eminence's establishment, he had thought it best to indulge the sickly child in his wish to return to the friends of his infancy ; and with that view he had remitted him to the care of his aunt, Jacintha Corri.”

This interesting letter was put into the hands of Juliet, and by her, shown in confidence to all her friends, which certainly included the whole community ; so that before Morgante had been many hours returned, all the reasons of his going

and coming were most satisfactorily known throughout the convent.—Meantime, the Abbess and Juliet had the delight of hearing from him, that Jacintha was arrived, and with the most affectionate earnestness in the service of her mistress ; moreover that she was, according to the judgment, and in the words of Morgante, “a bold-spirited, but gentle-hearted woman, who would be able, with the aid of her gay-hearted young son, to set dangers and difficulties at defiance.”

With this assurance they were forced to be content. A direction to the house of Pedro’s mother had been slipped into the hand of Jacintha, when she waited upon the Abbess with her sickly nephew, and they heard of her no more. The possibility of attracting attention to Camilla, if by illness, or other accident, she were detained in Ancona, prevented any inquiry being made by Geraldine at the dwelling of Pedro ; and painful as was the uncertainty respecting her, it was better to endure it, than to run the slightest risk of discovery.

The soldier who had escorted Morgante was

still detained in Rome, by business the Abbess had intrusted to him.

The calm which followed the violent emotions immediately succeeding Juliet's arrival at St. Catherina's, was most welcome both to Geraldine and her niece. The resolution which the Abbess had taken of resigning her situation in the convent, and finally retiring to England, to pass the remainder of her life among the relations of her mother, still continued; but it appeared that she was desirous of waiting for some weeks, before she announced her intended abdication. The interval was far from unhappy, though all Juliet's devoted confidence in her aunt, could not prevent occasional fits of anxiety respecting Hubert. Where was he?—Who was he?—What was he?

It was impossible to doubt that the Abbess could have answered all these queries; yet, though the name of Hubert was often spoken between them, though Geraldine seemed to seek, rather than shun, every conversation which led to the avowal of Juliet's tenderness for him,

the slightest hint of a wish to develop the mystery respecting him was checked by her saying, "Remember the fairy godmother's conditions, Juliet!—*no inquiries must be made.*"

And if, after this, emboldened by the daily increasing confidence with which she was treated, Juliet ventured to persevere, and gravely confess that this reserve made her unhappy, Geraldine would break up the conference, by saying—

"Surely it is not Juliet, who would wish me to break a solemn promise?"

Notwithstanding this one little vexation, Juliet was quite ready to confess that she had never before been so happy. Not a day passed without her being conscious of acquiring information, and becoming, as she sometimes affectionately boasted, more worthy of the friendship she so dearly valued.

As to Morgante, he was very nearly as well pleased as herself; his pageship was forgotten in favour of his miniature stature; and though Marcella still interdicted the threshold of the novices' gallery, he was often per-

mitted to enter the garden at the hour of recreation, and amused himself and the holy company he found there, with a thousand apish vagaries. His journey to Rome, with the history of his two days' sojourn in the palace of the princely cardinal, were never-failing sources of gossip and amusement. With the peculiar shrewdness of his character, he marked exactly how far his pleasantries might go, without shocking the feelings of his auditors; and discovered, without any very long study, who best loved to laugh, and who to lecture; which veil hid a wit, and which a saint; and, by dint of steering himself cautiously by the chart his acuteness thus enabled him to lay down, he contrived to become the petted favourite of the whole sisterhood. His fine voice was also a valuable acquisition to the poor nuns in these hours of idleness; and he was often made to sing and chant till he was weary. When this happened, he secured himself from further importunity by gravely declaring, that he felt symptoms of the same malady which had obliged him to resign his grand situ-

ation at Rome,—a hint which never failed to bring upon him a shower of sugar-plums and cautions, “to be very careful of his voice, which was doubtless given by the especial favour of God, on purpose to sing his praises.”

On one occasion, however, the roguish page was very near getting into a serious scrape, by the indulgence of his laughter-loving humour. He was, as usual, surrounded by a large group of recluses, one evening when Juliet was passing the hour of recreation on the chapel terrace with her aunt, and therefore incapable of keeping watch over his fooleries.

As long as his young mistress was within reach, no motive was strong enough to draw Morgante from her side ; and while he remained under her eye, he seldom transgressed the limits of discretion, in his pleasantries ; but upon the evening in question, he ventured a jest that might have cost him dear.

Two of the nuns, who had voices of peculiar power and sweetness, and who, as is usual when this is the case, had been enjoined by

the superior to cultivate such a knowledge of music, as would enable them to be efficient assistants in the choir, were endeavouring to learn from Morgante an anthem which he had heard at Rome, and which his ear had perfectly retained. He had repeated this, with the words to which he had heard it applied, till he was tired, and being on this evening urged to give it again, he said—

“ I think, holy ladies, that if you will be pleased to sing it with some words that I learnt in the Cardinal’s palace, you would find it easier, than the *Ad te levavi oculos*, with which you have been practising it.”

“ New words, Morgante ?” said the cautious sister Lucia ; “ are they words which the church sanctions ?”

“ I heard them in the Cardinal’s palace, holy sister,” replied Morgante primly, “ and I am not free to doubt it.”

“ Truly, he is right,” said sister Agnes, “ if we may not look for holy words, in holy mouths, where may we hope to find them ?”

“Nay, sister Agnes,” replied the pious Lucia, “I did not mean to question it. What are these words, Morgante? I am sure I would willingly learn them, if they are not too difficult.”

“I do not think you will find them so, holy sisters,” said the page, in his most demure manner, “and they go most sweetly to the music.”

So saying, he raised his clear voice, and sang with all its powerful distinctness, the following words:—

“Vos monachi, vestri stomachi sunt amphora Bacchi,
Vos estis, Deus est testis, deterrima pestis *.”

“That is beautiful!” exclaimed both the musical students at once.

“I thought you would like it, holy ladies,” said the little mischief, pursing up his mouth, with an air of saint-like gravity.

“I must learn it,” said sister Agnes.

“Indeed, it would be a pity to lose the opportunity,” rejoined Lucia.

* The literal English of which is—

Monks, your stomachs are skins of wine,
Ye are, God is witness, a most baneful pest.

“ Well, ladies, I shall be proud to teach you. Will you be pleased both of you, to say after me, Vos monachi—”

“ Vos monachi,” repeated the docile nuns.

“ Vestri stomachi.”

“ Vestri stomachi,” they continued with pious fervour.

“ Sunt amphora Bacchi,” continued Morgante with strong emphasis, which the well practised ears of his pupils enabled them to catch admirably.

“ Now sing so far, holy sisters, upon the same notes as the—*Ad te levavi, &c.*”

They did so, with great unction, and to his inexpressible delight, gave to every word the exact emphasis he had taught. Gratified by the earnest praise of Morgante, who, baby as he was, had quite sufficient reputation among them as a musician, to be accounted a competent judge, the sweet voices of the two nuns ceased not to swell into their fullest power, as they continued their ludicrous exercise; nor was the urchin satisfied, till he had taught them the

whole, impressing upon them with great earnestness, the peculiar beauty which the performance gained, by a somewhat vehement enunciation of the two last words. A graver person than Morgante might certainly have found food for mirth, in the manner with which, after this lesson, sisters Lucia and Agnes paced the alleys of the garden, arm in arm, reiterating with emulative fervour, and with all the power of their lungs—*deterrima pestis*.

It is generally acknowledged, that no situation of life, however deep its shade, can exempt the dweller in it from a wish to catch, from time to time, a passing ray of admiration. The truth of this was clearly proved in the case of our musical nuns. They longed to introduce their new anthem to other ears than those of their companions of the cloister; and accordingly, having sedulously instructed the choir in the strain, and above all in the clear pronunciation of the words, they decided upon performing it the next time the visitor and confessor attended mass in the chapel. Nor had they long to wait

for an opportunity of making the desired display. Isidore, curious to mark the impression which remained on the mind of the Abbess, from the fate of Camilla, which, though it had failed to make her betray herself according to his hope, had nevertheless, as he had been assured, nearly proved fatal to her, sent early notice of his intention to confer the honour of his presence at a Sunday mass.

Had it not been, however, for the peculiar clearness of enunciation, upon which sisters Lucia and Agnes had insisted, in their instructions to the choir upon this occasion, neither the visitor, nor the officiating priests, would have been likely to take much notice of the words; but the thundering *amphora Bacchi* and *detrerrima pestis* must have roused the most slumbering attention; and, accordingly, the wondering ecclesiastics listened to, and distinguished the whole, with feelings of astonishment and indignation, which may easily be imagined.

As soon as the service was ended, Isidore

requested to see the Abbess in the parlour. She immediately complied with his wish, and found him sitting there, with the priests who had performed the mass standing behind him. She bowed to them all, and then seated herself opposite Isidore.

“Know you, holy mother,” he began, “what anthem your choir favoured us with, after the *Gloria tibi, Domine*?”

“No, my lord; I am no musician, and it is sister Lucia who selects the chants and anthems.”

“May I see sister Lucia immediately?”

“Assuredly, my lord.”

Sister Lucia was sent for. “Be so good, my daughter,” said the Abbot, “as to recite for us the words of the anthem you sung this morning.”

Sister Lucia readily complied, and repeated Morgante’s lines with great clearness and precision.

Isidore perceived clearly that she did not understand a word of what she uttered, and con-

tented himself with desiring she would inform him who had taught her these words.

“It was Morgante, my lord,” replied Lucia, without hesitation.

“And who may Morgante be?” inquired the Abbot, addressing himself rather to the Abbess than to her nun.

Geraldine, who had listened to her attentively, as she pronounced the absurd words of Morgante’s anthem, was both surprised and provoked in the highest degree, and resented the affront, with almost as much indignation as Isidore himself.

“Morgante, my lord,” she replied, “is an orphan boy brought up by the charity of my brother; and if sister Lucia has learned these abominable words from him, which cannot be doubted, since we have her testimony for it, he must either prove, to my entire satisfaction, that he was as ignorant of what he taught, as she of what she learnt, or——he must be dealt with as he deserves.”

“And how came he here, holy mother?”

“ I brought him from Albano, my lord, on account of his uncommonly fine voice, which I thought might make him acceptable to some friends I have in Rome.”

“ And how long has he returned from thence ? —that is——” suddenly correcting himself, “ if you have already sent him thither.”

“ Not more than a week, my lord. He caught a cold on the way thither, which rendered him incapable of singing ; and I must now seek some other patronage for him—that is, if he clear himself of this abomination. If he do not, I shall immediately send him back to the Count d’Albano, who will know better than I can, what to do with him.”

“ He certainly appears to be a strange instructor for your nuns, holy mother,” replied the Abbot with a sneer :—“ may I be permitted to see this strange inmate of your nunnery ?”

“ He is an inmate of the porter’s lodgings, my lord,” replied the Abbess ; “ but if it be your lordship’s pleasure, I can order the child to be brought hither.”

In a few minutes Morgante appeared, and no sooner perceived sister Lucia and the Abbot face to face, than he suspected the cause for which he had been summoned; but as fearless in temper, as ready in resource, he was nothing daunted, but prepared himself to bear patiently and to answer discreetly, whatever might be said to him.

“Was it you, child, who taught this holy nun to sing the words of the anthem which was performed in the chapel to-day?”

“Yes, my lord; so please your lordship; and the tune too,” replied Morgante, with a look inconceivably innocent.

“Know you what the words mean, boy?”

“No, your holy reverence, that’s more than I was ever taught; but I know it is something about the holy Virgin.”

It was almost impossible to avoid smiling at the extreme demureness with which Morgante uttered this; and unfortunately the eye of Isidore turned at that moment towards the Abbess, who had not been able entirely to resist it.

She immediately recovered her composure, and said—

“ Where, sir, did you learn these words ?”

“ In the palace of my lord, the Cardinal;” replied the boy.

“ How mean you, boy ?” said Isidore. “ Dare you say, that these vile ribald words were taught you there ?”

“ Not so, my lord. I think not that any one in the lord Cardinal’s household would have troubled themselves to teach me any thing. On the contrary, my lord, they seemed strangely disposed to make a mockery of my church music. But without especial teaching, please your holy lordship, I never fail to learn whatever I hear sung. But is there harm in those words, holy mother ?” asked Morgante, looking at the Abbess with an air of innocent surprise.

“ Yes, boy ; there is much harm in them.”

“ Then it was sin and shame in them, to let me hear such,” replied the child ; “ for they asked me where I came from, and I told them from a most holy convent ; on which they

struck up this anthem (and truly the notes are musical), and one and all of them declared I looked like a little monk myself; and told me, if I was a wise child I should remember the words they had sung, and repeat them, whenever I had the honour of finding myself in company with any of the profession, and then they sang it again—giving me just so much teaching as that comes to.”

“My lord Cardinal shall learn what pestilent heretics he hath near him,” said Isidore rising.

“Take care, boy, that you are never again heard to utter such blasphemy.”

“I utter blasphemy, my lord!” cried the urchin, with well-feigned horror;—“oh! what would Father Laurence say, if he heard that!”

Without deigning to take further notice of him, Isidore turned to the Abbess, and said—

“The unfortunate women, who have been blindly led into this abomination, must confess, and receive absolution for it forthwith.—I must depart, holy mother; but I will leave brother Vincentio to perform this office. Let the whole

choir be informed of the sin they have done !”—
And turning to the priest, who was to remain,
he said—

“ The seven penitential psalms, to be repeated
kneeling, should make a part of the penance,
brother.”

Then muttering a general “ Benedicite,” he
withdrew.

CHAPTER XXXI.

And blindfold death, not let me see my son.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE Abbot of St. Andrea's returned from this visit more convinced than ever of the secret heresy of Geraldine. The cause of this renewed and confirmed suspicion was apparently very trifling, but the point of a needle may convey poison as effectually as the blade of a falchion; and when the Abbess of St. Catherina's permitted a smile at Morgante's ludicrous blunder to pass across her countenance, it produced as deep disgust and rage on the mind of the bigot, as the most deliberate blasphemy could have done.

He already hated her with all the intensity of

his hard and gloomy nature. She had thwarted, defied, and baffled him, through long years of tacit struggling, and had stood the last awful proof to which he had brought her, in a manner that had even staggered his deeply-rooted belief of her secret apostacy. But all she had gained by the arduous victory over external feeling, on the day of Camilla's trial, was lost by the slight indiscretion of a single instant. The nature of this new offence was, from its very lightness, what he could least endure. To see her fall prostrate at his feet, from the agony endured by conforming her outward seeming to his inward will, had something in it that soothed his pride, and ministered to the whole knot of venomous passions which fed upon his heart;—but that she should dare in his presence to smile at a scoffing jest against his sacred calling, drove him to madness, and he left her, determined at once to hazard every thing, by an open and avowed attack upon her as a heretic.—Before he slept, the following letter was dispatched to Father Dominic.

“This accursed woman is a heretic, di Pino, a most accursed heretic—and if I let her escape me, may my soul howl in purgatory for ever !

“With art, as deep and damnable as that of her detested kinsman, she has permitted the sacrifice of the nun whom I placed in her house, though by her creed it was a heinous sin, yet still she let it be—false, even in her apostacy, she used not the slightest effort to save her. That scheme has proved abortive. I was a fool to believe her capable of sincerity, even in error.

“It is now, therefore, to you, di Pino, that I turn all my hopes. It is to you I appeal, to support the accusation you have declared yourself ready to bring against her: but the burden of the righteous labour shall be all on me. It is I who will convey the accusation to the holy tribunal at Rome—it is I who will carry it through, or perish. To you, my friend, I look as my most important witness against her. I have reconsidered all the evidence you recited to me, during your last visit, and find it so ample, so clear, and every way sufficient, that I cease

not to blame the unnecessary delay which I have permitted to impede the course of justice, while waiting for the further confirmation I expected, during the recent trial at Sant' Catherina's. But doubt and hesitation are now over, di Pino; and the long tedious years of watchful zeal which have been devoted to the discovery of this woman's crimes will now reap their reward. I wait but till I hear from you, that you are ready;—that Father Laurence, and the woman Olive of whom you spoke, shall be prepared to give, when examined, the information which will be required of them;—and that your noble penitent, the Count d'Albano, shall be in such a frame of mind as may, at least, prevent his impeding our views. This latter point is highly important, my di Pino, and if you think that I could awaken his conscience to this awful duty, more effectually than Father Laurence or yourself can do, I will visit him.

“ Answer me on this without delay. Think not that the zeal I look for in you, my old and well-approved friend, shall go without reward.

Remember, di Pino, that no agent in the discovery of hidden heresy (the only crime that the church cannot pardon), was ever left without that reward and favour from the saints on earth, which is the surest forerunner of the reward and favour of Heaven.—Farewell.”

His resolution taken, Isidore, for a time, felt a degree of repose, from the removal of the uncertainty that had so long tortured him, which gave him a species of enjoyment amounting almost to happiness. His imagination revelled in the prophetic pictures it drew of his proud enemy subdued at last. He fancied he already saw her proud eye quenched in shame and suffering; already heard that voice, whose high authority had so long grated on his ear, sunk to the weak sob of female agony; and, as he dwelt upon his perfect vengeance, he was ready to allow, that years of defeated projects, and abortive hopes, would be a thousand-fold atoned for by such a termination.

While these fearful projects were gradually maturing, the unconscious object of them was assailed from another quarter by a misfortune which touched her very nearly.

About a month after the escape of Camilla from Sant' Catherina's, the Abbess was sitting with Juliet, in her own apartment, when she was told that a monk, who said he had travelled from a distance, begged to see her on important business. She went immediately to the public parlour of the convent, and to her great surprise saw Father Laurence standing outside the grate. She perceived at once that he brought melancholy news, for his countenance wore that decent air of regulated sorrow, which is intended to announce such. Geraldine's first idea was, that her brother was dead; but Father Laurence, in answer to her general inquiry, corrected her mistake, by uttering an ardent thanksgiving for the continued life and health of his illustrious patron.

“And may the holy company of saints, whose blessed office it is to watch over piety and gra-

ciousness on earth, long spare your noble brother to us, holy mother !”

“Amen !” was the only reply of Geraldine.

“But alas !” continued Father Laurence in a piteous whine—“his lovely heir—the hope of your ancient house—is gone ! The angels, and archangels, have taken him back amongst them !”

“Dead ?” exclaimed Geraldine with much emotion, “Ferdinand dead ?—Sweet boy—he was too frail a flower to live ! and yet—I had little thought he would have gone so soon.”

In answer to her inquiries as to the manner of his death, Father Laurence informed her, that “the boy had evidently pined, after the departure of his sister and Morgante.—At first no alarm was felt respecting him, but he gradually lost his appetite, his sleep, and his strength, from the day they left Albano,—and about a week ago, to the surprise of the whole household, took to his bed and died, after a low but rapid fever of a few days’ continuance.”

The Abbess shed some natural tears for the

early fate of one so near to her blood; and painfully anticipating the task of breaking it to Juliet, she was preparing to leave Father Laurence, recommending him to the hospitality of St. Andrea's, when that holy man stopped her by saying:—

“Not yet, holy mother;—I have not done my message to you.—This grievous news might have been brought to you by letter, or by one more easily spared from the castle, at such a moment, than your poor servant: but my business is to take back the Lady Juliet, now sole heiress of her noble house, to her afflicted father—and in this, holy mother, I may make no delay—not even to turn aside for the benefit of visiting the holy community of St. Andrea's. My orders are precise—the Lady Juliet must depart instantly, in a litter which waits in readiness, within the court,—your noble brother not choosing to trust the uncertain gales which might oppose the speed of her return by sea,—and not willing to lose the time necessary to obtain from Heaven by prayer, the wind that might waft her to his

doating arms with least delay.—Wherefore I will beg it of your courtesy, to hasten the illustrious damsel with all convenient speed. Her waiting-woman stays without, in case her services can any way assist the needful preparations.

This was a stroke which poor Geraldine was not prepared for. Her affection for Juliet had completely overcome the tranquil torpidity of heart, into which she had schooled herself; and the wish of living with her, and for her, had taken such hold of her imagination, that this sudden destruction of all her hopes quite overpowered her. She left the parlour, without saying a word in answer to this intelligence, and retired to her cell, that she might recover some degree of composure before she sought Juliet.

Meanwhile Olive had made her way into the very heart of the convent, and was already surrounded by her dear friends, sisters Beatrice, Clara, and Johanna, while the venerable Martha occupied herself in seeking to return the late

hospitality of Olive, in kind. There was more to be asked, and answered, on both sides, besides the necessary refreshment after the fatigues of a three days' journey, than could be easily got through, in the time allowed by Father Laurence for their continuance at Sant' Catherina's, and the gabble which ensued amongst them, showed how anxious they were to dispatch it within the prescribed period.

Juliet, totally ignorant of their arrival, had become so interested in a volume she was reading, as to have quite forgotten why her aunt had left her, or that she had said, as she did so, that she should return to her immediately. She was stationed near the balcony which overlooked the garden, when her attention, deeply as it was rivetted on her book, was called from it by the unusual clamour of tongues which she heard from below.

"She must see the garden," said sister Johanna.

"And the fruit trees," added sister Beatrice.

"Do run, sister Clara, will you now, and ask

for the key for a stranger.—Old Jacobo can hardly refuse it.”

“See, see,” cried Beatrice, “there are a dozen of the sisters coming to us, Signora, who will all want to talk to you; but you must stay with your old friends, you know, when you have got such a very short time to be with us.”

Juliet felt some curiosity to know who this stranger visitor might be, and she stepped out upon the balcony to reconnoitre. It was in vain, however, that she tried to penetrate the crowd of veiled heads, which encircled Olive; she only perceived that there was a female among them, in a black dress, though evidently not a religious habit. Giving up the attempt to see her face, Juliet quietly reseated herself, and had again returned to her book, when the voice of Olive reached her ear.

“And pray, how does our young lady do? I declare I was so delighted to see you all, that I never had the grace to ask for her before.”

Juliet again stepped into the balcony, and to her utter astonishment, saw Olive in deep

mourning, but with a countenance gay in smiles, looking up towards the window where she stood. The moment she caught her mistress's eye, however, the smiles vanished, and with a look more accordant to her dress, she saluted Juliet with an air that was intended to indicate both profound respect and sorrow. But both were equally unintelligible to Juliet, who returned her salutation by an eager inquiry for her father and "dear Ferdinand."

Olive drew forth her handkerchief, and applied it to her eyes.

"Holy Virgin!" exclaimed Juliet, "what is the matter, Olive? You are come to bring me some dreadful news! Speak, is it not so?"

"Oh, Signora! your poor dear brother—"

"My dear Ferdinand!" exclaimed Juliet.—
"Oh, Olive, why did you not send to ask for me?"

"I thought, Signora, that your holy aunt, the lady Abbess, would be the fittest person to tell you the sad news—Father Laurence is with her."

Juliet sat down, and wept bitterly. She felt as if she had never loved the sweet boy enough—she remembered his innocent fondness, his engaging gentleness, his winning beauty : and when, at length, her aunt entered to break to her, as cautiously as might be, the sad and sudden tidings, she found her in a state that at once showed the news had already reached her.

Their tears flowed together, but not from the same cause ; Juliet was as yet totally unconscious of the change this event was to make in her whole destiny ; and when Geraldine repeated the urgent orders of the Count for her immediate return, her grief at the separation from her aunt knew no bounds.

“ He will lose me, too, then !” she passionately exclaimed. “ My aunt !—I cannot live without you ——”

“ What will my fate be, Juliet ? so lately found——must I regret that I have ever known you ?”

“ How is all this to end ?” cried the poor girl. “ Will you then go to England ?—You must

leave me behind—I cannot now leave my poor father.”

“Juliet, I will never leave you, I cannot remain here; I am no longer capable of contenting myself with the existence I have hitherto led; you have shown me that I may still be happy. Dearest Juliet, I will obtain leave from Rome to resign my station; we shall meet ere long; you cannot, as you truly say, now leave Albano; but I will see you there, and that as speedily as possible. I need not now wait for the intelligence I looked for—every thing is changed.”

Juliet looked earnestly in the face of her aunt, to ascertain, if possible, what change she spoke of; but her eyes were turned away, and she could only see that, be it what it might, it was a source of uneasiness.

The present moment was too painful for either of them to wish it prolonged, even had it been in their choice; but the impatience of Father Laurence, who had spent the short interval they were together in seeking Morgante, and bidding him prepare for the journey, now caused him to

dispatch a message that hastened their separation ; and before either Geraldine or her niece had recovered the first effect of this stunning blow, they were already some miles asunder.

Morgante was grieved in heart at the loss of his little play-fellow ; but, in truth, he felt much consolation upon finding, that it would occasion him immediate remission from the bondage of St. Catherina's. His jokes had become all "stale, flat, and unprofitable," and since the affair of the anthem, he had found his holy patronesses much less inclined to profit by his various accomplishments, than before. In short, he anticipated the freedom of Albano, its woods, its cliffs, and its flowery knolls, with delight. Poor Juliet could not share his feelings ; Albano had never been a happy home to her, and now she felt that it would be still less so. Hitherto her days had passed cheerlessly there, from the want of companions and friends ; but now she was to feel the bitter sorrow of having lost by death one of the few objects she had ever loved. The light step of her little brother would no longer en-

liven the long gloomy galleries ; and her stranger friend, *Hubert*, as she had now learned to call him, who, for a few short months of her existence, had shed light, life, warmth, and animation over the dull, cold history of her existence, he, too, was lost to her, and probably for ever ; for to what else could those ominous words of her aunt refer—" Every thing is changed !"—" Changed, indeed !" thought Juliet ; " and I, too, am changed, and a thousand times less fit to endure the dull cold life of Albano, than I was before I left it."

These painful meditations were too heavy upon her spirits, to permit her finding consolation from the remarkable increase of respect towards her, which she observed in the manners both of Father Laurence and Olive. Instead of the tone of instruction and rebuke, to which she had been accustomed from the one, and the pert flippancy of unchecked familiarity, to which she had been obliged to submit from the other, she was now treated by both as a person only second in consequence to the Count himself.

Indifferent as she was to this change, it was too obvious not to attract her attention; but the smile, which such a display of paltry feeling might be well calculated to excite, was turned to a sigh, as she recollected the cause of it.

Not all the sedulous attention of her obsequious companions could prevent the journey from being one of fatigue and heaviness; and when Juliet reached the castle, she felt so thoroughly unwell, that nothing but a strong feeling of duty could have prevented her immediately retiring to bed.

She found her father, as she expected, in a state of the most clamorous grief; but the expression of it was mingled with protestations of his devoted affection to herself. His conversation, indeed, was a sort of see-saw between his despair for the loss of his son, and his expectation of happiness from the recovered presence of his daughter.

“No father ever lost so fair a son—the united world cannot produce his equal,” said he; “but at least,” he continued, a moment after, “it may

be the boast of Albano, that if its male line hath failed, its ancient possessions will descend upon one who will make the glory and the pride of, I trust, the noblest husband in Italy."

Juliet, who really felt the most tender pity for her father's loss, exerted herself with unvarying sweetness to console him for it; but though his pride was continually soothed by anticipations of the prodigious alliance he intended she should make, it was very evident to all who saw him, that his son's death had given him a shock which he would never recover.

His character, naturally feeble and fretful, now became so querulous as seriously to affect his health. The most trifling thing that thwarted his humour, he declared to have been caused by disrespect, on account of the approaching annihilation of his race; and his contradictory caprices, in regard to poor Juliet, almost wore her to death. Sometimes he ordered the whole household to attend him, and formally presenting Juliet to them, as their liege lady, commanded that she should be treated in every respect as if

she were already the sole representative of his noble house. This ceremony was repeated three times in the course of the week after her return. Sometimes he would burst into a fit of uncontrollable rage, because he fancied that they treated her with more love and reverence than they had ever shown to his lamented son.—Father Laurence assured Olive, that his patron could, in his present melancholy condition, afford ample employment to at least three confessors:—“For,” said he, yawning, “what with hearing his confessions, and granting absolutions, administering spiritual consolation, by promising a high station in heaven to him; and temporal comfort, by prophesying a high station on earth to his daughter, I am so completely tired by the time the day is done, that were it not for the Count’s fancy of lying late in bed of a morning, I really do think I must give up my place.”

Olive sympathized with him most feelingly, declaring that it was quite impossible for flesh and blood to bear it much longer.

“Fool that I was,” she continued, “I fan-

cied it was a fine piece of promotion for me to have an heiress to wait upon, instead of a little fool of a girl that was to be packed off to a nunnery; and so it might, if our queer old Count would but let her alone, for she is not one to give herself airs; I must say that for her; and never spoke to me more kindly in her life than since she has been lady, as one may say, of all this ground, castle, and estate; but my lord's whims are quite unbearable, Father Laurence; and if you don't put him upon a little penitence, or something of that sort, I really think I must go home to my mother. It quite makes me ill that's the real truth; and you know, Father Laurence, I never was very strong."

It was small comfort to poor Juliet, during these tedious days of unvarying dullness, but ever new vexations, that she was reminded from morning to night of her own increased importance; never did any one among the throngs of dignity-burdened mortals, who walk the earth, feel so oppressed by their load as Juliet. The long harangues upon her present station and her

future prospects were not only to be heard, but answered.

“Is it not a blessing, lady Juliet?” said the pompous old man, — “is it not a blessing, that you had not completed your noviciate before this heavy stroke fell upon our house?”

“Certainly, Sir,” she replied.

“Does not your ladyship feel the immense importance which attaches to your person under the present circumstances? Are you fully aware of this, lady Juliet?”

“I hope so, Sir.”

“You answer well; God forbid it should be otherwise! I should believe the earth itself was drawing near its final dissolution, if I saw the slightest reason to fear, that the heiress of Albano was unconscious of the high destiny to which it hath pleased God and the holy Virgin to call her. Give me the satisfaction of hearing you avow your feelings on this subject.”

“It shall be the study of my life, my dearest father, on this, and every other subject, to render

my feelings exactly such as you would wish them to be."

"Your answer, lady Juliet, gives evidence of the noble race you spring from; but, speaking of your noviciate, lady Juliet, I do not think your having taken the vows would have been any lasting impediment to the lofty views I have naturally formed for you. His Holiness has too just a value for the noblest blood in Italy, to have permitted its last hope to wither in the cloister. Do you not feel persuaded that this would have been the case?"

Yet it was not alone the extreme weariness of Juliet under these persecuting interrogatories, (though this certainly had its effect), which led her at length to meditate upon the possibility of changing the state of things that produced it. The evident suffering of her father, under the affliction that had fallen upon him, which, in spite of all the consolation he laboured to draw from the anticipation of her future greatness, was evidently wearing his life away, was certainly

the primary source of the idea which suggested itself to her for his relief.

“Why,” thought Juliet, “should not my father marry again? I need be no burden upon him. The ample fortune which my aunt inherited from her mother, will enable her to take me off his hands; he is still far from aged; and if he listen to this proposal, life will again open before him with hope and gladness—while I—every thing would again be changed, and my aunt might still be the fairy god-mother who should rule my destiny.”

Such were the meditations of Juliet; and after weighing them for several days, she determined to speak on the subject to her father, in the manner most likely to soothe his feelings, and excite his hopes.

With this view, she rather encouraged than checked the melancholy train of thoughts into which he fell, on observing some toy of his lost Ferdinand’s lying among the flowers in the garden, where she was walking with him.

Instead of answering, as she usually did, by

expressing her hope that time would soften his grief, she dilated upon the inevitable extinction of their ancient name, observing, that however well she might marry in accordance with his wishes, the name of Albano would not thereby be saved from perishing.

“And wherefore point that out to me, wretched girl?” cried the Count, giving way to a violent paroxysm of sorrow: “do you think I forget it for a single moment? Do you think I can look at the walls of my castle—at the arms of my ancestors—or even at the marble tombs that have covered their honoured relics for ages, without feeling the pang of knowing, that when I lie down beside them, our house, our honours, aye, and our very graves, must pass into the hands of a stranger?”

“It is, indeed, a mournful idea, my dear father,” replied Juliet; “so mournful, that I own I am surprised you have never turned your attention to the only means of averting it.”

“What means? Speak, child,—what means

have I, that can avert the stroke of fate—avert it ! alas ! it has already fallen.”

“ My dear father,” said Juliet, half frightened at her undertaking ; “ may I speak to you freely, the thoughts which this sad event has given rise to ? ”

“ Yes, lady Juliet, speak what you will,—but as for comfort—you have not the power to give it.”

“ But Heaven has, my dear father,” she replied. “ Why should you not again marry ?—Why should you not again become the father of a boy so lovely as our poor Ferdinand ? ”

The Count stopped short, and fixed his eyes upon her with an expression of almost comic admiration.

“ Heaven surely speaks by your organs, my daughter ! You have the face of an angel ; and, I well believe, the wisdom of one. It should seem as if the holy Virgin herself had inspired you, my child ; doubtless, it is her will, that you should still be one of the cloistered maids, who give their holy lives to sing her praise ! ”

“That part of the arrangement,” thought Juliet, “may be settled afterwards;” but delighted to find her undertaking so infinitely easier than she expected, she hastened, with renewed hopes, to strengthen the impression she had made.

It was, however, quite unnecessary to do so. It is certain that this bright idea, obvious as it was, had never occurred to the mind of the Count. When he lost his son, he began to think of his daughter; and his entire intellect had been occupied by considering, what marriage for her was within his power to arrange, which would give the greatest gratification to his vanity.

But that the marriage should be arranged for himself instead, was a prodigious improvement upon this; and no sooner had he conceived the notion, than he became an altered man. His step, as he returned to the castle, was again firm and stately; he was once more rather taller than nature intended; and the voice, with which he ordered a servant he encountered at the door, to

send Father Laurence to him, was as proud as if he were already the father of as many sons as Priam.

The Confessor obeyed the summons with the mournful, cat-like step, which had become general throughout the castle. Since the death of the young heir, no one, in the presence of the Count, had ever spoken, excepting in a whisper, and no one had moved, but with the cautious stillness that befits the chamber of death.

Father Laurence, accordingly, opened the door, as if fearing the sound should jar the nerves of his sick and captious patron, and great indeed was his surprise, when he was greeted by a loud and almost cheerful—

“Come in, good Father; come in.”

Well practised, as was our good-hearted friend, in divining the wishes, and catching the tone of the Count, he was on this occasion utterly thrown out, and ventured upon no nearer approach to sympathy, than by a sort of gentle smile, which might, with propriety, have been accompanied

by the words, "I think you seem better," if addressed to a dying man.

"I wish, Father Laurence, you would see that Bernardo takes good care of my jennet," began the inspired nobleman; "as to the housings, I will have them new; crimson and gold, remember; let the order be sent to Venice without delay; and let Olive be told, that she must be mindful of the laces for my ruffs."

Father Laurence stood before the Count, as he gave these orders, with the air of a man too much surprised even to attempt comprehending the meaning of what he heard.

The Count perceived his astonishment, and feeling the more displeased at it, from the consciousness that it was reasonable, exclaimed in no very gentle accent:—

"Why stare you so wildly, sir? Does your wisdom suppose, that because the heart of a tender father has, for a time, been in sorrow for a dear son's loss, he must, therefore, never ride on horseback more?"

“ I rejoice, my son—” began Father Laurence cautiously.

“ Well, well,” interrupted the animated Count, “ I hope you will rejoice. Let my steward know that I must have the price of the herds he is about to sell, with as little delay as possible ; and look you, Father Laurence, let me have the mirror which hangs in the late Countess’s closet removed into my own—and—I shall want my beard trimmed to-morrow.”

Father Laurence retired from the presence of his patron without uttering a word, and instantly sought lady Juliet, to whom he described the very singular change which had taken place in the manner and appearance of her father, hinting his fear, that the great sorrow which had lately fallen upon him, had probably unsettled his brain.

Juliet could with difficulty preserve her gravity, as she listened to this statement ; but truly rejoiced to find that her counsel was likely to produce such immediate effect, she thought it advisable to remove the mist which enveloped the

faculties of Father Laurence, by telling him that from what had passed between her father and herself that morning, she had reason to hope it was his purpose to seek consolation for his loss—

“ By devoting himself to the cloister !” cried Father Laurence, eagerly interrupting her ; “ it is just what I expected ; dear, pious nobleman ! he must indeed be well prepared with gold ; there be many things that will be needful for him ; there is the offering for the altar ; and the usual fee for the lay brethren ; besides the donations and benefactions, and——”

Juliet could resist no longer, but burst into so uncontrollable a fit of laughter, that Father Laurence stood perfectly confounded, and began to suspect, that some mental infirmity had attacked both father and daughter.

A few moments, however, sufficed to make him understand the nature of the consolation, which it was the purpose of his noble penitent to seek ; but he was scarcely disposed to believe Juliet in her right senses, when he perceived that she

appeared sincerely delighted at the prospect of an event, which would be likely to rob her of all the advantages she had gained by the death of Ferdinand.

Her joy, however, was as lasting as sincere ; and never was a disinterested act more immediately productive of good results to the doer of it, than was this of Juliet. Her father, entirely occupied in preparing for the nuptials which he only waited for the expiration of his first mourning to arrange, gave her no trouble or embarrassment whatever ; she was mistress of her time, and of the seat under the chestnut-tree ; and though every hour seemed two, which passed without receiving tidings of her aunt, they were cheered by hope, and occupied by delightful plans for the future.

CHAPTER XXXII.

I will put off my hope, and keep it no longer for my flatterer.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE messenger who conveyed the letter of the Abbot of St. Andrea's to Father Dominic, brought back the following answer to it, with as little delay as possible.

“ MOST HONOURED FRIEND,

“ It was without any feeling of surprise, that I learnt what the conduct of the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's had been, on the occasion of immuring the nun Camilla. Though personally a stranger to this most pestilent hypocrite, I have

heard enough of her, both from you, and from others, to be fully aware of her real character. Forgive me, my brother, if I even venture to suggest that it is possible I may know this Abbess still better than you do. Notwithstanding the atrocious wickedness which, doubtless, you so justly attribute to her, I am well assured that her weakness is that of a child in all that concerns the sufferings which it is the duty of the church to inflict on offenders. Wherefore I do not believe, whatever you may have seen or heard to the contrary, that the nun Camilla really did suffer execution in her convent. There is one amongst us who knows this Geraldine d'Albano well; one Francesco Garroni; he is a lay brother of our community, and has for many years filled the place of manciple at Santa Croce, but formerly was a serving man in the castle d'Albano.

“ This man knew Geraldine d'Albano from the hour of her birth, to that in which she left her father's castle, to take the vows at Sant' Catharina's; and upon my examining him as to her

natural temper, strength of mind, and the like, he gave me such an account of her, as to convince me that on this point you are mistaken.

“ You state explicitly, my brother, that the event is over; trust me, if this be so, she has found some means of eluding your vigilance. Be not satisfied with having seen the sentence performed before your eyes, unless you have most certain proof, that no opportunity of saving the criminal could occur afterwards. I know nothing of the localities of Sant’ Catharina’s, and can therefore give no opinion as to the possibility or impossibility of this; but you are in full possession of all the information necessary to form a judgment on the subject; and I earnestly counsel you, my brother, not to suffer any thing short of absolute certainty, to convince you that the nun Camilla has actually perished in the way you suppose. May I be right in my suspicions! and may you, my brother, find means to discover that I am so! think of the inevitable perdition such a

discovery would bring upon her; think of the gratitude due to him, who should make the discovery of such appalling dereliction of duty in a woman, who has lorded it thus long among the highest and the holiest of the church! My brother, my heart glows with holy joy as I think of this; listen then to your poor friend, and if the faintest shadow of possibility attaches to this suspicion, sift it to the bottom—so shall the righteous flourish, and sinners perish in the way! For all that concerns my testimony, be sure it will be such as you wish to find it. I have no doubt, that a proper examination could be made to produce much that might be useful, from the Confessor, and the servant Olive: wherefore I would have them summoned, as you desire; but as to the Count, I doubt if he could either aid, or mar your purpose. He was ever a weak-minded man, though a devout catholic; and, since the death of his heir, is said to have fallen into great feebleness both of body and mind. I shall be in waiting to receive and obey the summons of the holy office, and will

be careful that the witnesses from the castle shall not be delayed.—Farewell.”

On reading this letter—Isidore’s emotions were so strong, that his first action was to rise and fasten the bolt of his door, that no eye might penetrate his sanctuary, before he had subdued them. This done, he gave himself up, for a few short moments, to an intensity of enjoyment that he had not tasted for years—“Admirable di Pino !” he exclaimed in extacy, “thou shalt be great for this.—What strange, and almost fatal blindness has been upon me ! Di Pino, I will be true to thee—thou art my good angel, and I will have thee ever near me—yet has she used art, little short of magic, if she has done it—that fainting then was feigned—she must have hid herself within the chapel—Woman—Devil—whatever thou art, ’tis strange if thou canst now escape me !”

This letter reached Isidore at night, and it was not without a strong effort, that he determined to wait till morning for the examination his soul thirsted to make.

As early on the following day, as it was possible to present himself at Sant' Catherina's, the Abbot was before the gates—he was shown to the parlour, and Geraldine immediately obeyed his request to see her.

He addressed her with even more than usual courtesy, and inquired for her health with tedious particularity, that he might have time to read, in the sweet composure of her noble countenance, the peace and tranquillity which proclaimed her guilt.

Having enjoyed this study as long as he wished, he addressed her in an accent of more than ordinary gentleness, saying:—

“My reason for intruding upon you at this early hour, holy mother, is that I might state to you, with the least possible loss of time, some rather alarming information which I received last night respecting the foundations of this building,—some fishermen told the servants of St. Andrea's, who very properly brought the intelligence to me, that there are symptoms of the sea-wall beneath the chapel-terrace giving

way—this is alarming, and must be looked to, without loss of time.”

Geraldine turned very pale, but rallied instantly, and said with sufficient earnestness to account for the emotion she was aware of having shown :—

“I trust our beautiful chapel is not endangered by it? at all events, my lord, I will send immediately for workmen to examine it.”

“You will do well, holy mother,” replied the Abbot ; “but I will beg you instantly to order that torches be made ready to attend me ; my duty requires that I should myself examine accurately the state of the vaults, which support the chapel-terrace ; your illness, holy mother, prevented my returning to you the key of these dungeons, on the night we had occasion to use them, and I have it ready.”

Geraldine felt that all was lost.

She remained silent and motionless in her chair, as if fixed there by the spell of an enchanter ; while, drawing himself up to the fullest extent of his lofty stature, Isidore stood before

her, delaying for an instant the last full assurance of his triumph, that he might enjoy the delicious spectacle of her abasement.

At last then, he saw this proud and hated woman within his grasp—at last, he saw the eye of his enemy sink beneath his own.

For one short moment she felt wholly subdued, and that moment was a bitter one—but the weakness lasted no longer. She remembered that the threatened danger would fall upon herself alone;—she remembered that Juliet was safe,—and Camilla free. Her wonted spirit again rose within her, and the same smile of cold contempt, that had so often maddened him, again curled her lips, as she replied:—

“Your lordship’s watchfulness for our convent’s safety demands my grateful thanks. Our servants shall attend you.”

She was about to leave the room, but turned back, when he answered, “I need not trouble your people, holy mother—I come provided with my own—all that I need, is light to assist our examinations. Be pleased to order that the

torches be made ready,—and perhaps, holy mother, you will do me the favour of receiving my report in person.”

The Abbess bowed, and left the room without any further reply.

As she passed along the passage that led from the parlour to the stairs, she saw from a window, which opened upon the inner court of the convent, that several men were stationed within it. This unusual intrusion at once announced to her the fact, that Isidore had come fully prepared to find that Camilla had escaped, and to secure immediately the person suspected of having assisted her in doing so:—that she herself must necessarily be the first object of such suspicion, could not for a moment be doubted: but it was not this, that once more shook the courage of Geraldine—her thoughts instantly turned to Camilla—Had she then been discovered? was she again within the power of the church? Had all the danger risked, and the misery suffered for her, been in vain?

It was almost impossible to doubt, that such was in truth the sad result of poor Juliet's heroic action; and so heavily did this persuasion rest on the mind of Geraldine, that her own share in the danger was almost forgotten, till a fresh intimation that the Abbot of St. Andrea's waited to see her, recalled her attention to herself.—As she again walked through the passage that led to the parlour, she heard, through an open window which looked into the court, where Isidore's attendants still stood with their glaring torches in their hands, the raised voice of one of the grooms, who communicated, in terms of coarse jesting to his fellows, the discovery they had made. Had she doubted her fate, his words would have proclaimed it. When the Abbess again entered the parlour, Isidore was pacing the floor of it, with a hurried and unequal step, wholly unlike his usual still and tranquil demeanour. He turned towards her, as she entered; but it was in vain that he struggled to assume the tone and manner which the circumstances of the moment seemed to demand; unquenchable triumph

gleamed from his deep-set eye; his voice faltered, his words were unconnected, and scarcely audible; and Geraldine stood before him, unable to discover what his immediate purpose was respecting her.—For a moment he ceased his efforts to speak, and remained silently gazing upon her; then suddenly exerting himself to conquer the emotion that had overpowered him, he said, in a voice loud and deep, yet still trembling with ill-disguised exultation,—“Woman! you are my prisoner.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Past, and to come, seem best ; things present, worst.

SHAKSPEARE.

WITHIN four and twenty hours after the scene described in the last chapter, the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's found herself alone, in a close litter, on her way to Rome. The only favour granted her, and indeed the only one she had asked, was permission to see her Confessor before she left her convent ; probably, as she remarked, for ever. Had not this request been made in the presence of many witnesses, among whom were two officers of the Inquisition, it may be doubted if her triumphant enemy would have granted it. As it was, however, after the hesitation of a moment,

he permitted Father Anselmo to be sent for; and the good man was closeted with Geraldine for the space of half an hour, immediately before her departure.

Father Anselmo had for many years been intimately known, and highly respected by the Abbess.

To discuss theological questions, made no part of the Confessor's duty, with a penitent holding such station as that of Geraldine; and if the absolution she regularly received from him could not, according to her sounder judgment, convey all he intended it should bestow; if it was in the solitude of her own chamber, that her heart poured forth its full confession to her Maker, and rested its hopes of absolution only on the promised mercy of her Saviour, their mutual esteem was no way lessened by the unavowed difference in their opinions.

Geraldine knew Father Anselmo to be a truly pious, benevolent, and virtuous man; and his judgment of her was founded on an intimate knowledge of her pure and righteous conduct, in

the important situation she filled. Esteem and attachment, equally well-founded, and equally cordial, existed between them; and this interview proved the sincerity of it on both sides.

A solitary journey of many days, under such circumstances as those in which Geraldine left Sant' Catherina's, would have subdued the spirits and shaken the courage of most women, but on her, its effect was otherwise. Her life had been such as to temper her mind to the sustaining firmly whatever shock it could encounter; and the hoarded comfort of her true religion gave her a strength of endurance which almost defied the power of fortune to subdue.—Isidore grieved that both the dignity of his rank, as the mitred Abbot of St. Andrea's, and the hallowed mystery of his office in the Inquisition, alike prevented his being in the train that guarded Geraldine. He grieved to lose the view of those sufferings he loved to picture to his fancy; but could his eye have followed her from the beginning of her journey to the end of it, he would have found more food for wonder than for exultation.

On arriving at Rome, the Abbess was lodged, with the observance befitting her rank, in a handsome but remote dwelling, which, while it allowed all the attendance required by ceremony, permitted also the accommodation of a guard, sufficiently numerous to have defeated the operations of a whole host of traitors. The only female permitted to approach her was an old woman, who either being, or affecting to be, totally deaf, remained for a great part of every day in a corner of the room in which Geraldine sat, without returning any other answer to all she said than a low moaning, which seemed to indicate suffering, or annoyance from being questioned. At night the Abbess was permitted to be alone; but the change of sentinels every two hours outside her door, sufficiently indicated the care with which she was guarded. All communication from without was rigorously interdicted. She asked the servant who brought her meals, to furnish her with the materials for writing, but he only shook his head in reply. A tedious week, which not even the philosophy of Geraldine could rob

of its leaden slowness, wore wearily away, and still the noble prisoner heard nothing of her accuser, her trial, or her crime.

Bartone, meanwhile, encountered more difficulty than he had anticipated, in conveying to those before whom he had laid his accusation, such an impression concerning his prisoner, as it was absolutely necessary to his views that they should receive, before she should be brought to trial.

He had arrested, and conveyed her as a prisoner to Rome, upon his own authority, as an inquisitor, holding a high station in the holy tribunal; and the power with which he was invested, fully justified him in doing so. But beyond this point, he could no longer act alone; and to his bitter mortification he found, at the first discussion, which took place in the congregation of the holy office, after the accusation against the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's had been received, that the general feeling of the brethren was strongly in her favour, and that the accusation was considered as being, probably, the result

of mistake, under circumstances evidently of great difficulty. Isidore dared not be too absolute in opposing this opinion.

The holy office was, at least, as jealous in protecting true catholics, especially when high in station, as vehement in the prosecution of heretics; and to impeach the sanctity and honour of Geraldine d'Albano, would be, as more than one cautious inquisitor argued, giving a stab to themselves.

But Isidore was not a man who could be listened to without effect; and the opinions of the congregation were greatly divided on the question before them, which was, whether or not Geraldine d'Albano should be summoned to stand her trial before the holy office, for aiding the escape of a condemned nun from her convent.

The congregation of the holy office met at Rome three times in every week; and on the meeting which took place on Thursdays, the Pope himself always assisted in person. The office of Grand Inquisitor had been long abolished, from its being found to interfere too

much with the functions of the supreme power, and its authority was now vested in the cardinals, whose decisions came under the cognizance of his Holiness.

At the two first meetings, which succeeded Geraldine's arrival in Rome, the Pope was not present; but on the following Thursday, he appeared as usual; and when the question was again started, gave it as his decided opinion, that the interests of the Romish Church could in no way be advanced by bringing to trial one of the most esteemed and respected dignitaries it could boast. He refused his belief in the possibility of her guilt, but avowed that this was not the ground of his objection. The conviction of such an offender being, as his Holiness remarked, calculated to bring infinitely more mischief to the church, than the punishment of a hundred obscure heretics, to bring good.

The substance of this argument was too accordant to the feelings and judgments of the cardinals, and monks, who constituted the congregation, not to be received with as much

genuine approbation for its own sake, as respectful deference for the quarter whence it came; and Isidore trembled as he saw his full-blown hopes, thus blighted and withering before his eyes.

It had originally been his intention to let the recorded accusation against the Abbess relate solely to the escape of Camilla, keeping the evidence of di Pino, and his associates, to be brought forward in proof of general depravity, for the purpose of increasing the detestation of her judges, and consequently the severity and contumely of her sentence. But he now found it would be necessary that the statements Father Dominic was keeping in reserve against her, should be communicated in the form of a distinct accusation by di Pino himself; and as he was not yet arrived in Rome, the Abbot appeared to yield implicitly to the opinion of his Holiness, (for it was only uttered as such, and by no means as a judgment), deciding that the affair should rest in silence, while he awaited the coming of his confederate.

Geraldine suffered severely from this prolonged confinement; another week had now nearly worn away, and her situation continued exactly the same. There is, perhaps, nothing more difficult to bear, than long enduring suspense, especially if it fall upon us when the mind has no external object on which to fix itself: nothing weighs so heavily upon the spirits, as a vacuum; and the Abbess felt more worn by misery during this fortnight's profitless seclusion, than in the fearful terror of her first alarm, or even during the awful scenes which succeeded it.

That Juliet was ignorant of her situation, was, perhaps, the most agreeable reflection that diversified the melancholy reveries of Geraldine, and the great improbability that any tidings of it could reach her, prevented her feeling any immediate anxiety on her account. It was fortunate that this persuasion had so strongly impressed itself upon her; for could she have figured to herself the real situation of Juliet, her own would have been wretched indeed. We left her joyfully anticipating the renewed happiness of

her father, and though the demonstrations of his own agreeable prognostics were sometimes so whimsical, as to draw a smile from her, and a hearty laugh from Morgante, there was enough of serious consolation in the affair, to induce her seriously to promote it, by every means in her power :—the fair lady was already chosen—proposals sent to her family—the wardrobe of the Count as splendidly renewed as his mourning would permit, and himself almost persuaded, that the symptoms of ill health, which had long been growing upon him, were all to be chased by the happy union he contemplated.

In the midst of this general contentment, a letter arrived by an express for Father Laurence. The moment the messenger had delivered it at the gate of the castle, he rode off, nor was there any means by which Father Laurence, or his friends, could discover whence, or from whom it came.

The contents of it, however, which the Confessor immediately communicated to the family, were such as to plunge them into a state of

anxiety that instantly caused all other interests to be forgotten. The letter was as follows :—

*To the holy Father, Laurence, Confessor at the
Castle d' Albano.*

REVEREND FATHER,

“ I have that to tell, which it dearly imports your patron, the Count d' Albano, to know ; that I tell you not from whence this intelligence comes, cannot, in reason, affect your belief in it, inasmuch as the truth may easily be learned by inquiry.

“ The holy and most excellent Abbess of Sant' Catherina's is fallen into dire distress, being accused of having assisted in the escape of a nun condemned for breach of vows. I do most truly hold her innocent of this ; and though it be not consistent with my own safety to stir too openly in the matter, I will suffer nothing that I can do, to be wanting, in order that such her innocence shall appear.

“ She was yesterday conveyed, under a strong

guard, to Rome, where, as I have reason to believe, she will undergo trial before the holy tribunal of the Inquisition; and though it cannot be doubted, that in a court where the highest and the holiest of the earth be judges, a true and righteous judgment shall be given; yet, not the less does it behove those concerned for the safety of an accused person, to do their utmost, that all true evidence in her favour should appear. Wherefore, holy Father, I address myself to you, believing, that from your long knowledge of this excellent lady, you may be enabled to bring before her judges such proofs of her holy life and character as may avail her much; and the more easily, as from your holy calling, you will, questionless, be enabled to gain access, where others might fail to enter.

“Be earnest to save the innocent, and farewell.”

Father Laurence was at least as eager to communicate this strange and startling intelligence,

as he could have been to announce the most agreeable news. He entered the room where Juliet and her father were sitting, both in great harmony of spirits, and conversing on many pleasant plans for the future, when, without softening or preface of any kind, he bluntly exclaimed :—

“ Here is a letter, my lord Count, that brings strange news. Your sister, the most noble Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s is arrested by the holy office on suspicion of having aided a condemned nun to escape from punishment.”

A wild and piercing shriek burst from the unhappy Juliet, she started from her seat, and throwing her arms around the neck of her father, cried aloud with passionate eagerness :—

“ You will let me go to her? My dear, dear father, you will let me go to her?”

“ Where is she?” inquired the Count with much composure.

“ In the prison of the Inquisition at Rome,” replied Father Laurence with equal magnanimity.

Juliet caught the letter from his hand, and hastily leaving the room, sought the solitude of her own chamber to read and brood over the terrible contents.

She discovered, indeed, that it contained no instructions as to where she might hope to find her, and she knew enough of the nature and government of the holy office (as who did not?) to be aware that for her to penetrate within its recesses, was impossible; but others might, though she could not; and all the energy of her mind was directed to discover to whom might be confided this dear and precious trust.

There was much in the letter which led her to believe that the writer, whose friendly motives it was impossible to doubt, conceived Father Laurence to be well fitted for this commission; but Juliet doubted his zeal in the cause of her aunt; or, indeed, in any cause that might interfere with his own safety, or even comfort; and, moreover, she was conscious that his personal knowledge of her, was of too recent a date to give any great authority to his evidence.

While pondering these thoughts, and reading again and again the letter she held in her hand, she remembered that the manciple in the convent of Santa Croce was an old retainer of the family, who was said to be so devout a man as to have outlived all earthly attachments and feelings, excepting only his devoted love and admiration of the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's, whom it was his boast to have nursed upon his knees. This old man, whose name was Francesco Garroni, had, she knew, often been invited by Father Laurence to visit him at the castle; but the Confessor always declared, that old Francesco seemed afraid to trust himself with the sight of his old haunts.

“He fears, good man,” said he, “that the world should get hold of his heart anew.”

Juliet had frequently seen the manciple in her visits to the church of Santa Croce; but the intercourse between them had extended no further than a friendly inquiry on her side, and an earnest blessing on his; yet it was to him her thoughts now turned, as one whose enthusiastic

love and reverence for her aunt, might profitably eke out the languid zeal of Father Laurence.

Her mind had no sooner glanced towards this infirm old man, than she determined upon seeing him. Poor Juliet had, in truth, need of finding some one who felt real affection for her aunt. Her heart turned in bitterness from the recollection of the manner in which her father had received this dreadful intelligence ; and, for the first time in her life, she felt totally fearless and careless whether approval or blame might follow the step she was about to take. She thought only of Geraldine—all else on earth was indifferent to her.

The distance to Santa Croce was inconsiderable to one so used to walking as Juliet ; but she had never traversed it alone, and now, unhappily, her page was gone to Torre Vecchia, on some trifling errand, that might detain him for an hour or two. Juliet could not wait his return ; her mind was in a fever of restless impatience, and she instantly set off alone on this wild and almost hopeless expedition.

The flowery bank beyond the stream—the

short interval of open pasture ground on its summit—and the dark forest through which her path afterwards led, were all traversed almost unconsciously by Juliet, who was so intently occupied in meditating on her errand, that she found herself before the gates of the convent before she thought the distance half passed.

The old porter welcomed her with great respect, but very evident surprise, which was not lessened by the eager manner in which she requested immediate admission to the old man-ciple Fra' Francesco.

“Surely, surely, Signora,” said the venerable porter, looking questions, though asking none, as he preceded her across the court to the convent parlour. He begged she would be seated there, while he commanded the attendance of the person she wished to see.

Unfortunately for Juliet, a visit from the heiress of Albano, was too important an event at Santa Croce, not to produce a violent sensation throughout the whole establishment; and the porter, instead of immediately seeking Fran-

cesco, had indulged himself in a little gossip on the way, with every brother he met, till at last the strange news reached the prior, who immediately hastened to testify his respect, by repairing to the parlour.

Juliet was already in a state of the most feverish excitement. The dreadful shock she had received, the vehement rapidity with which she had walked, and the active, but futile energy with which her mind conceived and rejected a succession of wild plans for the relief of her beloved friend, had altogether thrown her into a state of great agitation. It would be difficult to say what were the precise hopes and expectations she had formed from seeing the old manciple, but when, instead of him, the Prior Ambrose entered the room, she burst into tears.

Shocked, surprised, and embarrassed, the prior was totally at a loss how to address his unexpected visiter—he overwhelmed her with his hopes that, her noble father was well—that she was herself not ill—that nothing disagreeable had procured him this honour, till poor Juliet,

utterly overcome by vexation at her own precipitancy, as well as by all else that oppressed her, could only sob out the name of “ Francesco Garroni.”

To hear the name of the old manciple uttered in accents of such strong emotion, by the Lady Juliet d’Albano, so confounded the prior, that he stood before her without pronouncing a single word in reply ; but the short interval which this silence allowed her for reflection, was more useful than any thing he could have said, and Juliet presently recovered herself sufficiently to say with restored composure :—

“ Holy prior, my father wishes immediately to see this old servant of our family, to question him relative to a subject it is probable he may remember better than any other.”

“ He shall wait upon my lord the Count instantly,” replied the prior with great respect, “ but I could have wished my Lord had chosen another messenger—your ladyship seems overwearied by the walk.”

“ It was my choice to come, holy father,” re-

plied the young lady ; “ I wish myself to converse with Francesco Garroni, and can do so freely, as we return together.”

The prior waited for a moment, to see if she would afford him any further information, but as she remained silent, he left her, and in a few minutes the feeble old man, whom she had invited to be the companion of her return, appeared before her.

Juliet rose to meet him.

“ Do you think, Francesco,” said she, kindly extending her hand to him, “ that you shall be able to walk to Albano with me ? ”

“ To Albano ? ” replied the old man, shaking in every limb : — “ To Albano ? — and with you ? — looking as you do now — pale, wan, sorrowful ? No ; I cannot go.”

The prior had followed Garroni into the room, and when he heard him speak this bold and firm refusal to comply with the wish expressed by Lady Juliet, he exclaimed indignantly, — “ What mean you, Fra’ Francesco ? Is it thus the servants of the Santa Croce ought to treat her

benefactors? Think better of it, good brother, or your age will scarce save you from the discipline; and you, too, of all men alive, to rebel against them. Who was it placed you here? Who duly pays your pension and your fees? Fie on it, fie on it, Garroni."

While the prior continued to rate him thus, the old man stood with his eyes immoveably fixed upon Juliet; but he made no movement which indicated obedience. In her eagerness to depart, she had retreated towards the door, and now remained with the lock of it in her hand, awaiting the final decision of Garroni; but still he moved not. She turned back, and laying her hand gently on his arm, said:—

"Francesco, I have much to tell you respecting my aunt. Will you not like to hear it?"

"Your aunt?—your daughter—do you mean your daughter? That saint whose prayers shall save my soul alive? yes, let me hear of her. Know you not she is the only safety left me?"

"It is your aunt, young lady," said prior Ambrose, "who pays his pension here. We

still call him manciple, but for many years he has been much too unsteady to work for his maintenance, and her bounty puts him at his ease among us—this is his meaning.”

Garroni for the first time removed his eyes from Juliet, and turned them upon his superior, but without speaking a word. There was, however, no difficulty in interpreting the look, and the movement of the head which accompanied it; they very plainly denied his interpretation. Juliet again addressed him with a question, as to whether he thought he could walk with her to Albano, adding, “I have a message to you, Garroni, from the Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s.”

“A message from her!” exclaimed the old man, his eyes immediately losing their expression of wildness:—“A message from her? Oh, yes, I am well able to walk to Albano for that; and I would go to her, though I were sure of seeing her heretic mother sitting close beside her.”

With an alacrity and quickness of movement greatly beyond her expectations, Francesco now

strode on before her. She followed him across the court, and through the gateway by the porter's lodgings, into the forest. Here she called on him to stop, as she was desirous that their walk to the castle should give her time and opportunity for explaining to him the situation of his revered friend, and impress upon his mind the necessity of some exertion to save her. Garroni stopped at her bidding, and when she had overtaken him, she found that his countenance had completely recovered its wonted melancholy composure, which her sudden inquiry for him had so greatly disturbed.

“ Francesco,” she began, “ the Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s is in great trouble; and all her friends must join together to help her.”

“ Whatever her trouble may be,” replied the old man, “ all the elders of the church, with our most holy father the Pope at their head, will all come forward to save her from it.”

“ I trust they will, Francesco; I trust they will; but we are told, that those who have

known her from her youth may be, above all, necessary on the present occasion."

"Then was she surely right in sending to me, and to none other," he replied; "for who else has known her as I have done? Heaven made her an angel; but it was I,—the poor and humble Garroni,—who was chosen by the Virgin to make her a saint; I have never told her this; I have never boasted of what she owes me—but it is much."

"I know she values your faithful services highly," replied Juliet, though not well understanding the meaning of his words; "and I know you love her well; it is for this, Francesco, that I come to seek you——."

"You do not know," said the old man, slackening his pace, and laying his hand upon her arm, "how it was the holy Abbess of Sant' Catherina's was first made a nun?"

"Perhaps not, exactly," replied Juliet, rather wishing to hear what account a person who was residing in the castle at the time, might give of it:—"Do you know, Francesco?"

“It is only I, and one other, who does,” he answered, almost in a whisper, “and that other—never till I have left the earth, and put off mortal flesh, am I to know whether that other be a saint or—a demon.”

The last word was uttered with a shudder, which seemed to run through his whole frame, and communicated itself to Juliet, on whose arm his hand still rested.

“Isidore?” murmured Juliet almost involuntarily.

“Isidore?—What know you of Isidore?” exclaimed Francesco, grasping her arm more firmly:—“What know you of Isidore?”

“I know,” replied Juliet, solemnly, “that if ever Heaven permitted a demon to walk the earth, it is in the person of Isidore we must look for him. Francesco! It is Isidore who is seeking to destroy Geraldine d’Albano.”

The aged fingers relaxed their hold, and the hand of Garroni fell heavily by his side. Juliet looked in his face, and was terrified at its ghastly hue and expression.

“What ails you, good brother?” said she, trying to support him :—“Sit down here for a moment; endeavour to recover yourself. If you know aught against Isidore Bartone, it may go far towards saving my beloved aunt.”

“If I know aught against Isidore Bartone,” exclaimed Francesco, raising his eyes and feeble arms to Heaven,—“If I know aught against him? Oh, had I never known him, and his fearful doctrine, my life would have been one long day of thankful happiness; I thought that innocence of heart and life, were all that God required of those who, like me, were poor and ignorant—I should have thought so still—but Isidore came and taught me otherwise.”

Garroni had obeyed the movement of Juliet, and seated himself on the stem of a large tree which had fallen beside the path; she stood before him, listening with breathless attention to every syllable he uttered, and fearing to answer him, lest any word of hers might turn the current of his thoughts and check the communication of what was labouring in the old man’s bosom. For

a few moments he continued silent, his hands clasped over the top of the staff he carried, and his head resting against it, and when he again spoke, it was no longer in the tone of declamation, but of earnest inquiry.

“Are you sure, Juliet d’Albano, that Isidore, the Abbot of St. Andrea’s, seeks to work evil to Geraldine, Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s?”

“Alas ! too sure, Francesco ; she lies this moment, as I have dreadful reason to believe, within the prison of the Inquisition at Rome—under an accusation laid by him—most falsely laid—as I can clearly prove, could I but find the means of facing him.”

“Then God in his mercy has let me see the light of truth before I die. Let us not linger here, let us onward to the castle, my dear child :—fear not for her—tremble not thus, and do not look so pale, for then ——” Garroni rose, as he said this, and began walking so rapidly towards the castle, that Juliet had some difficulty in keeping up with him. He no longer addressed

himself to her, but continued from time to time to mutter to himself, "I have still strength left to bear me on to Rome.—'Tis there I'll meet him—she shall not perish in his gripe—yes, they shall hear me."

In this manner he hurried on till he reached the brink of the little rivulet, and here his strength seemed to fail him, he again sat down for a few moments, but was now perfectly silent, appearing altogether exhausted.

"Shall I fetch Barnado from the garden to help you up the steep bank, good brother?" said Juliet, after she had given him a few minutes to recover himself.

"It shall not need, my child; I feel that strength will be given me." He arose, and slowly mounted to the garden-gate. On arriving there, he stopped Juliet as she was about to open it, while he said:—

"Repeat to no one within the castle, what I have spoken of Bartone: let me be sent to Rome as a witness summoned by your aunt—

at better leisure you shall tell me more of what has been falsely brought against her—but let it be when we are alone.”

Juliet gave him her promise that she would comply with this request, and they entered the castle together.

THE END OF VOL. II.



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